MYSTERY MOUNTAIN

• JAMES CLOYD BOWMAN •

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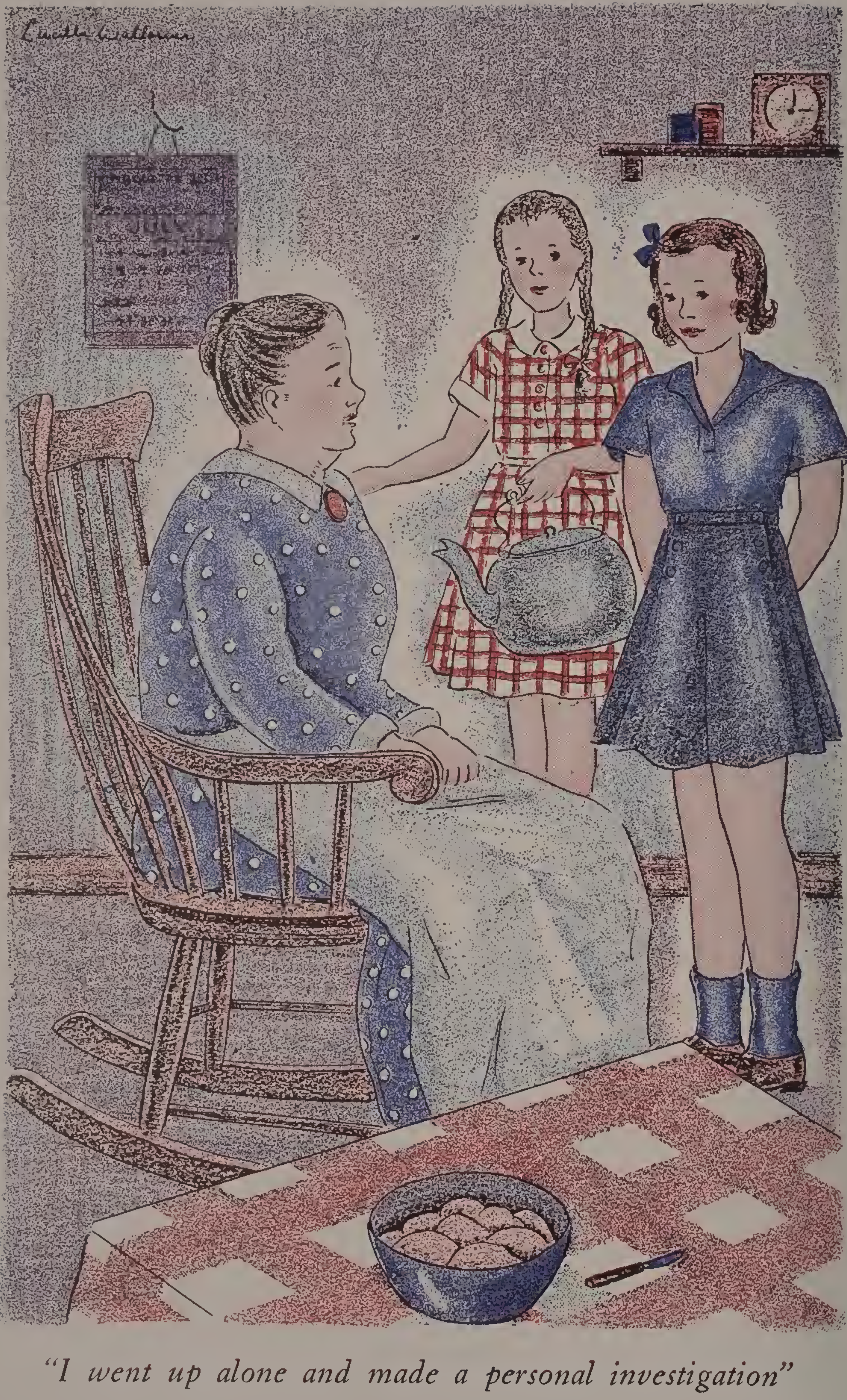
Lucille Wallower
JULY

"I went up alone and made a personal investigation"

MYSTERY MOUNTAIN

By

JAMES CLOYD BOWMAN

Author of

Pecos Bill, Tales from a Finnish Tupa, Etc.

Pictured by

LUCILLE WALLOWER

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This story was written
for
Helen, Ruth, and Jeanne

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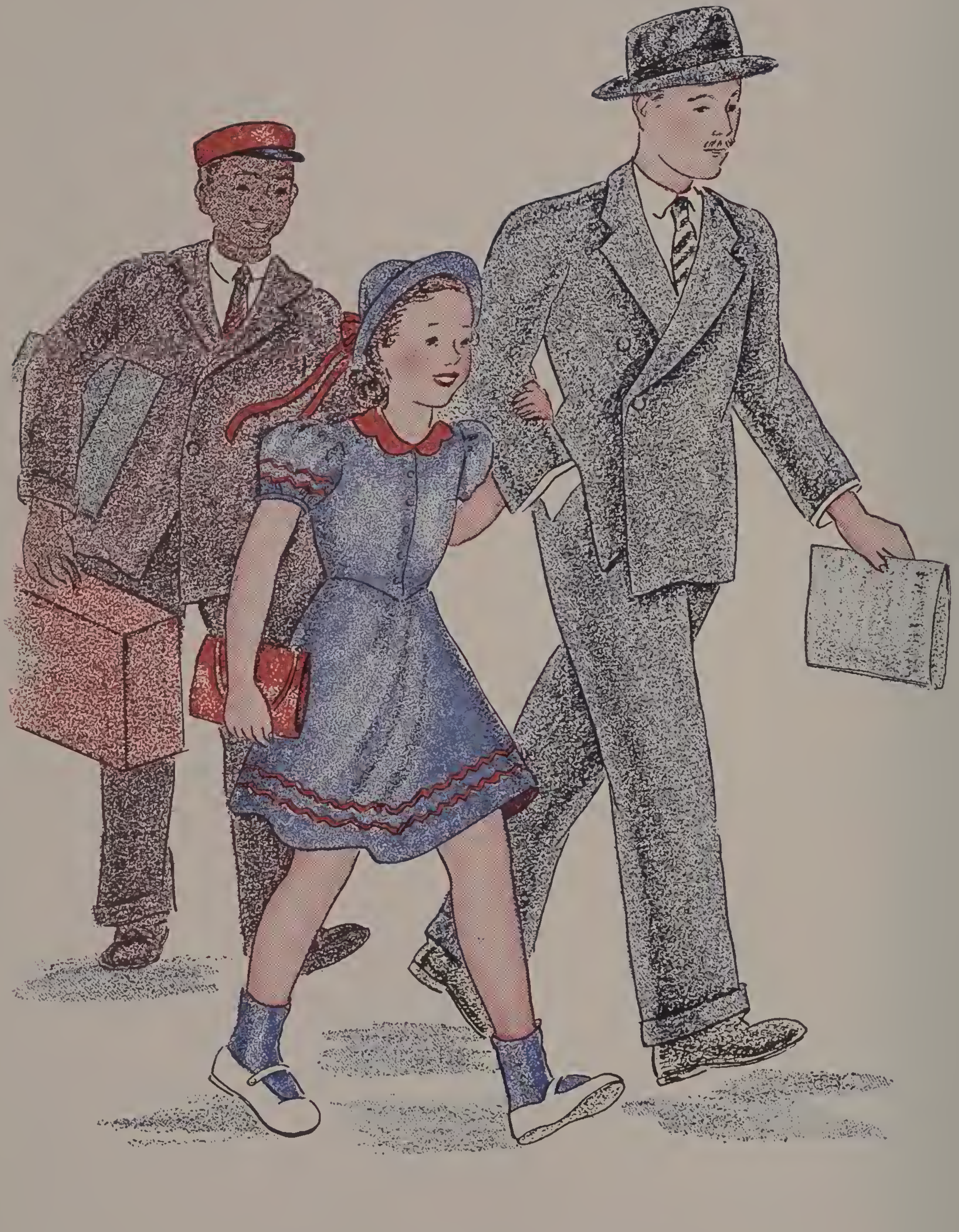


Rosemary tugged at his arm

I.

ALONE IN A PULLMAN

TRAIN for Milwaukee—ee—ee, Green Ba—a—y, Menominee—ee—ee, and Marque—e—ette, now read—ee—ee, track twenty-two—oo—oo." The voice of the train-caller boomed through the large marble waiting-room of the Chicago & Northwestern Railway Station.

Crowds of women, carrying awkward bundles and leading excited children, and men tugging at heavy satchels pushed toward the gate leading to the train shed. The only calm person in this restless throng was Dr. William Brown. Efficient, well groomed, and serious, he made no effort to dispute his place in the crowd. Rosemary, his twelve-year-old daughter, tugged at his arm, trying in vain to make him hurry, while a smiling redcap followed at his heels with the luggage.

When they reached Rosemary's section in the Pullman car, Dr. Brown began the advice that he had neglected to give earlier, "Remember your diet, Rosy Posy. Don't eat green apples. And be sure the milk is pasteurized. Be courteous to everyone. Pay the proper respect to your Aunt Polly, and be kind to your cousin Betty. They may expect you to be snippy. Don't be a snob. Be common as an old shoe."

"Yes, yes, yes, Daddy-Doc," Rosemary replied impatiently. "But I do wish they had some saddle horses and a tennis court."

"Climbing the hills and romping over the rocky mountainside will be a hundred times more fun for a change," continued Rosemary's father in an even, measured tone. "And besides, remember—"

"You're surely making up for a lot of lost time," Rosemary interrupted.

Then they were both interrupted by the brakeman's "All aboard! A—l—ll a—bo—o—oard!" and by the hissing steam and the clanging bell of the engine.

"And if you should need me badly," her father added as he gave her a parting kiss, "I could perhaps manage to fly up to Marquette and spend part of Sunday with you."

Rosemary's mother had died not long before and Dr. Brown felt a pang of loneliness as his daughter started on her journey. Rosemary, however, was so excited over the prospects of her first trip alone that she felt only happiness when the train started.

Rosemary was an attractive girl, with chestnut brown hair which curled boyishly in ringlets, and eyes that were grey-blue. Her profile was as delicately carved as a cameo, and there was about her an air of breeding and distinction. As the train got under way, she sat eagerly on the edge of her seat, gazing curiously at the people about her.

She had left the Chicago station at six in the evening and was due to arrive in Marquette, Michigan—a town of some fifteen thousand that nestled on a beautiful harbor on Lake Superior—at seven forty-five the following morning. After a while Rosemary became bored at looking at the backs of people's heads, so she took her cousin Betty's letter from her handbag, and began to read it.

> ". . . . And, oh, yes, the castle you asked about is the spookiest place in the world, and looks down from the top of Harkins Mountain like a wise old owl. At a distance, the castle looks like a human face, and so people speak of it as the Old Man of the Mountain. Day and night, this face seems a Peeping Tom, gazing at everybody and everything when it shouldn't. When a person is sent to run errands or goes out to play, the cold staring eyes bore you like a gimlet. They overlook every part of the town all the while, and even peer out across the Bay and count all the big and little ships that come and go. One even has the feeling that the eyes can peer through mist and fog and rain and everything. Oh, yes, Harkins is a Mystery Mountain, and no mistake.
>
> But really you can't possibly imagine how creepy the

> castle is till you've seen it with your own eyes. I haven't told you the half, and when you hear about all the ghosts that people have seen, you will know that I have told you very few of the wonders. But I must hurry so that this letter will get off on the evening train, and reach you before you leave home."

Rosemary's eyes opened wide with wonder; and when she closed them and tried to imagine what the face would be like, she grew so excited she could scarcely wait to see it for herself.

"Ticket please, Miss." The conductor's voice chased away all dreamy wondering. Rosemary gave a slight start, and fumbled in her purse for what seemed half an hour.

"Lucky you haven't lost it yet," the conductor smiled as he handed back the reservation slip. "You had better hide it away deep in the bottom of your purse this time, or you may lose it."

Entirely ignoring his sally, Rosemary asked with dignity, "When will the porter make up my berth?"

"I'll send him right away, if you wish."

"Oh, you needn't bother, for I'm going to sit up ever so late tonight."

Rosemary tried to assume the poise of a grown woman as she opened a magazine to show the conductor that the conversation was ended. But the magazine was not half so interesting as Betty's letter, which she took out of her bag and read for the 'steenth time. Her eyes filled with fresh wonder as she tried to imagine in detail the features of the Old Man of the Mountain.

Before long the train stopped at Milwaukee, and Rosemary was again brought back to the world of reality, when the porter conducted a young woman to Rosemary's section. While the luggage was being put in place, Rosemary recalled her father's most emphatic bit of advice: "And always remember not to become too friendly and intimate with strangers. You never can tell."

The young woman seemed very attractive as she removed her soft felt hat, shook out her wavy black hair, powdered her nose with dainty precision, and then looked straight into Rosemary's eyes.

"And are you going far?" she asked.

"Only as far as Marquette," Rosemary answered with cool dignity.

"Why, what a coincidence! I'm going there myself."

Rosemary bit her lip, thinking of her father's warning: "Beware of strangers who pretend to be going to the same place you are, and who say they know the people you know."

"And who are you going to visit?" continued the young woman with a friendly smile.

"Betty Brown," Rosemary replied curtly, not wishing to tell a falsehood nor to appear entirely discourteous.

"Oh, yes, let me see," the young woman answered, knitting her brow and seeming to think hard. "Betty is Hiram Brown's daughter, isn't she? Mr. Brown, I believe, is one of the foremen at the iron Ore Dock."

"That's right, and of course you know Uncle Hiram and Aunt Polly," Rosemary added, although with a note of doubt that she couldn't quite conceal. Of course this strange woman would know them, for hadn't she been warned that doubtful strangers always did know the very people you were going to visit? The thing that puzzled Rosemary most was the fact that this particular stranger didn't look at all like a suspicious character. Instead, she seemed to be a perfectly delightful person.

"And do you also know about the strange castle at the top of Harkins Mountain?" Rosemary asked when her curiosity overcame her caution.

"Castle? Mountain? Oh, yes, you must mean the deserted hotel, which everyone calls the Old Man of the Mountain."

"Yes, that's it," Rosemary answered, her eyes aglow.

"Since you mention it, the hotel does look like a castle, somewhat like those in old German prints of castles on the Rhine."

"And have you ever been near the Old Man of the

Mountain?" Rosemary asked, trying to hide her excitement.

"Why, yes, quite near; that is, about as close as anyone ever goes, for it's an out-of-the-way, creepy place. People climb the mountain, not to see the deserted hotel, but because of the wonderful view, for there is a marvelous outlook. You suddenly become aware of a wide circle of hills that seem to march away arm in arm to the far horizon; and running down to Lake Superior from where you stand is a valley like the palm of your hand, and here nestles the town of Marquette, like a peaceful child in its mother's arms. But as you climb the mountain, your eyes turn to the pure indigo blue of the lake, for the vivid color recalls pictures of Italy."

"And what about the hotel itself?" Rosemary interrupted eagerly.

"Well, from a distance, it gives the impression of a human face. The great dormer windows are the eyes, and the veranda, as you look upward, seems to be a wide, gaping mouth. The entire face looks cold and calculating, and so naturally people speak of it as the Old Man of the Mountain."

"What kind of town is Marquette?" Rosemary asked.

"It's a homey place, and different from any town you've ever visited. You see, I'm not a native of that North Country, and so its uniqueness has impressed me a lot. Years ago, when iron ore was discovered in the hills around Negaunee and Ishpeming, fifteen miles away, Marquette became the natural port for shipping ore to Cleveland and Toledo and Detroit. And since the town has such a beautiful setting, it became the chief residential community of the section. As people became wealthy, they built beautiful homes on the hills overlooking the lake and the bay, and soon Marquette became the political center of the entire region, a sort of secondary capital of the state of Michigan."

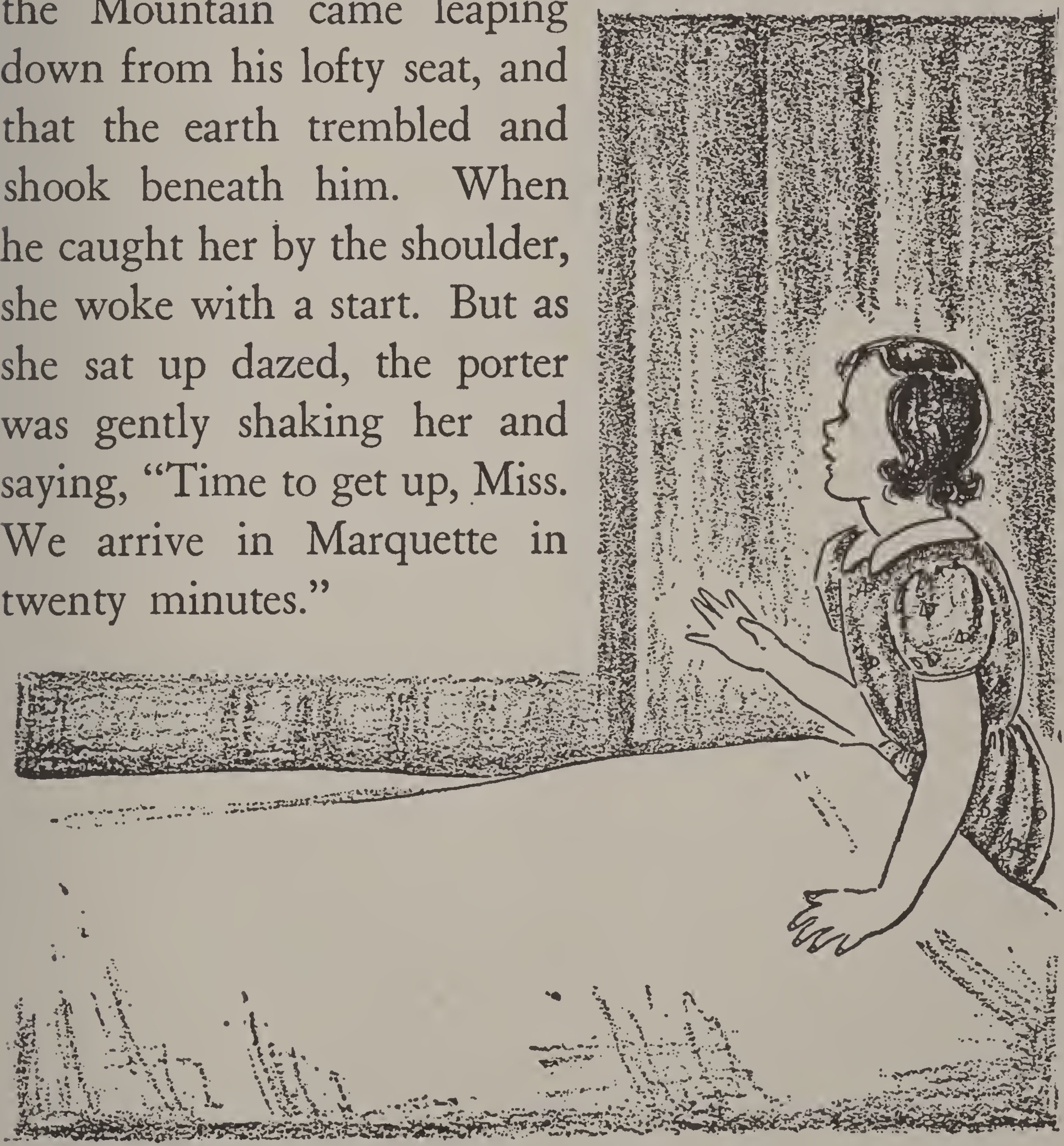
"What an interesting place it must be," Rosemary commented.

"And the people are different, too. They are wholesome, hospitable folk, and spend much of their leisure time out-of-doors, for the natural scenery is not only wild and picturesque, but the streams are full of speckled trout, and in the woods there are deer and wolves and bears. Just recently I heard that they are planting moose in the wilder sections."

At this point the porter came to make up the berth and the conversation was brought to an end. Rosemary was disappointed that she had to go to bed so early, especially when this stranger could tell her so many interesting things about Marquette.

During the night, Rosemary was too excited to relax. The train jiggled and rattled, and she could not go to sleep. One sentence from Betty's letter kept running through her mind over and over, "The Old Man of the Mountain is the spookiest place in the world, and his face looks like a wise old owl."

After what seemed like a hundred years, Rosemary fell into a restless, fitful catnap and had a vivid dream. She thought the Old Man of the Mountain came leaping down from his lofty seat, and that the earth trembled and shook beneath him. When he caught her by the shoulder, she woke with a start. But as she sat up dazed, the porter was gently shaking her and saying, "Time to get up, Miss. We arrive in Marquette in twenty minutes."



2.

UNCLE HIRAM ASSISTS

Betty and Aunt Polly and Uncle Hiram were so excited over Rosemary's coming visit that Aunt Polly woke the family at five-thirty. After a hurried breakfast, she bustled about, putting things in order for Rosemary's arrival.

Betty's mother was large and fat and always short of breath. She often jokingly said that she guessed she was "somewhat without form and unavoidable." Usually she was puffing and wheezing, and people who met her for the first time were afraid that she was in danger of losing her breath completely. She was a motherly soul and was always doing something for others, and that is why all her neighbors and friends called her Aunt Polly.

On this particular morning she was puffing and wheezing much more than usual. As she polished the dishes at the kitchen sink, she gave crisp orders to Uncle Hiram and Betty.

Uncle Hiram—a sturdy, methodical man with a mind that worked as precisely as the multiplication table—was boss of the Ore Dock for the Duluth, South Shore and Atlantic Railroad. Day in and day out, year in and year out, he worked at the top of the towering steel pier that lifted its gigantic forearm far out over the bay. The top of the pier was a hundred and fifty feet above the water, and here Uncle Hiram directed the men as they prodded the iron ore from the railway cars into the yawning pockets of the dock, and then in turn from the dock pockets along the slender troughs into the cavernous holds of the anchored steel ore boats.

The engines, as they switched the cars about the pier to the proper pockets, snarled and coughed and belched blinding sooty coal smoke. Meantime the lumpy ore jangled and grumbled down the long chutes, emitting a cloud of rusty iron dust that painted the men's faces a coppery, reddish-brown and worked its way into the fabric of their clothes until they shone as if polished by a bootblack.

Uncle Hiram also had to keep a record of the working time of each of the men under him, and thus his mind was crammed with a hundred different accounts.

"I figure, Poll," remarked Uncle Hiram as he put an extra leaf into the round dining table, "that Rosemary won't take any notice of all the cleanin' and scrapin' around we're doin', for if she's anything like her illustrious father, she'll be the most absent-minded person in all creation."

"Don't fool yourself, Hiram Brown," Aunt Polly replied as she finished scouring her great frying pan. "You seem to forget that Rosemary has been reared in the lap of plenty and has always been accustomed to see things spick and span, and that her father keeps a house full of servants."

"Yes, and don't I know that hired help is lazier than sin," Uncle Hiram argued as he mounted a chair and dusted the three Wedgwood dinner plates on the rail over the sideboard. This was one of his regular duties whenever there was company. Aunt Polly was too heavy to trust herself to stand in a chair, and Betty was not tall enough to be allowed to handle the precious family heirlooms.

"Well, it won't hurt you a bit to help me a minute or two longer, for this is a very special occasion," Aunt Polly added as she came into the dining room to see what progress he was making. "You know I don't often ask you to do anything, and besides, you also know that you don't like the sight o' dust half as well as I do."

"But we don't have to be quite so fussy clean," Uncle Hiram stormed.

"You sound like a spoiled child, Hiram Brown, and you know it; but keep at your work, and we'll be through in a jiffy."

All this time Betty was upstairs in her own room, which she was going to share with Rosemary. Her mother had allowed her to furnish this room to suit her own taste. So Betty had enameled the woodwork in ivory, and had painted the walls a lovely sun-glow color. Her curtains and tufted bedspread and braided scatter rugs were warm and cheerful.

Betty prided herself most of all, though, on her vanity table. She had made it herself by lacquering the top of an old-fashioned square center table and tacking figured chintz curtains around the sides. She was now putting the finishing touches to everything in the room, hoping that Rosemary would admire her taste, when suddenly her mother's voice rang out.

"Aren't you through up there yet, Betty?"

"I'm coming down this minute," Betty shouted in reply, as she arranged the wild pink roses she had gathered from the mountainside and smoothed out the last wrinkle in the tufted bedspread.

"For goodness sakes," called her mother in exasperation, "you're slower than molasses in cold weather. Can't you hurry this once? Trains wait for no man. There are still a thousand things spoiling to be done!"

Before going downstairs, Betty glanced quickly out of her narrow window to see if the Old Man of the Mountain was amused over all the excitement. He surely was, for strangely enough his giant features seemed softened into a grotesque smile.

"Betty, must I come and drag you downstairs?"

Betty raced happily down the narrow back stairs, hitting only every third tread.

"Take this dustcloth and go over everything in the parlor," Betty's mother spoke crisply, as she finished pushing the damp cloth carefully over the woodwork in the dining room, "And remember, there mustn't be the least speck of dust when you are through."

Betty ran into the front room, which was never used except when company came, and began dusting the willow rocker, which kept its drab appearance whether dusted or not. Then she went on to the golden oak rocker, and was rewarded by its shining smile. She gave the small straight cherry chair, with its fancy brocaded stuffed seat, only a lick and a promise.

Fortunately, only the arms and feet of the faded blue tapestry davenport needed attention. Finally, Betty attacked the square handmade walnut table, the stereoscopic glass, the cut glass dish of trinkets, and the family album done in red plush. Dusting was usually such a boring job, but this time Betty was so happy that she did not mind.

When Betty returned to the dining room, her father was in quite a turmoil, as he kept telling his wife again and again that he simply *must* leave for his day's work.

"I've only eighteen minutes to reach the dock, and the best I've ever done in my life is seventeen minutes, and that's when I was much younger and in better trim than I am now. Why, I haven't been late to work in ten years, and I'm not going to break my record today."

"I tell you you're not going to budge out of this house till you move the sideboard over from the window. And besides, a carload of rusty ore one way or the other won't make or break the company for this once!"

The sideboard was the pride of Aunt Polly's heart, and she was sure it would show off to better advantage if moved slightly. Uncle Hiram quickly realized that she was determined to have her way, and that he was only wasting precious minutes by continuing the argument. So he did as she wished.

"A little farther to the left," Aunt Polly directed, and Uncle Hiram strained every muscle. "There, that's a mite too far—that's better. Now pull the right end out in front a few inches." Uncle Hiram flew back and forth like a puppet on a string. "There, not quite so far. Now back an inch or two with the left end—no, not so far—That's perfect. Now you can go. Thank you!"

As Uncle Hiram jerked on his coat, he gave Betty a parting word of advice, "Share everything you have with Rosemary. She's a Brown the same as you are, and living in the city doesn't make a mite of difference. She's your cousin."

Outside the door, Uncle Hiram felt as relieved as a mouse that has, by a miracle, escaped a trap. He hurried down the mountain at a half-run, and the neighbors knew this time that he was "Shaving it mighty close," as he would say. Had they not known that Rosemary was coming for a visit, they would have been certain that his lateness was due to a death in the family. Nothing short of that would have delayed him. Uncle Hiram was so regular in his habits that the women of the neighborhood could set their clocks at six forty-five exactly when they saw him pass in the morning.

In the last twenty minutes before the train was due, Aunt Polly and Betty walked down to the station. Betty had never before fully realized how slowly her mother walked. She kept wondering, as she skipped lightly ahead, why her mother was always urging others to hurry when she was so poky herself. Aunt Polly was doing her best, but she was wheezing so loudly that the neighbors wondered whether or not she would really make it this time. And to add to Betty's excitement, the incoming train whistled shrilly before they had even reached the station.

"Remember your manners, Betty," Aunt Polly called between deep breaths. "It's no disgrace to live in a small town; but it's shameful to give a show of bad manners."

"Oh, Mother, please hurry!" Betty shouted in excitement, trying to recall every detail of the description Rosemary had given in her last letter:

> "I'll be wearing a blue coat trimmed in red. My hat also has a red band; and I'll be carrying a shiny hatbox in one hand and a blue umbrella in the other. My Daddy-Doc insists it will be raining when I get off the train. I don't agree with him, but to humor his whim, I'm carrying the umbrella. Maybe I'll ask the porter to call out my name so that you will know me, for it would be dreadful to be lost in a strange city. Be sure to meet me at the station, for I'll surely die of heart failure if you're not on the platform."

In spite of all their hurry, Aunt Polly and Betty had not a second to spare. The train came to a stop just as they reached the station. Betty was all expectation, and Aunt Polly pulled herself together with glowing pride. To her mind, Betty was the most wonderful girl in the world and would stand comparison with any girl from the city. A kindly smile overspread her face as she stopped, heaving and puffing, her eyes glued to the steps of the Pullman.

3.

ROSEMARY ARRIVES

When the porter opened the Pullman door, Rosemary was standing at the head of the line, impatient to get off. She had her coat thrown across her arm, but she was not carrying the blue umbrella described in her letter.

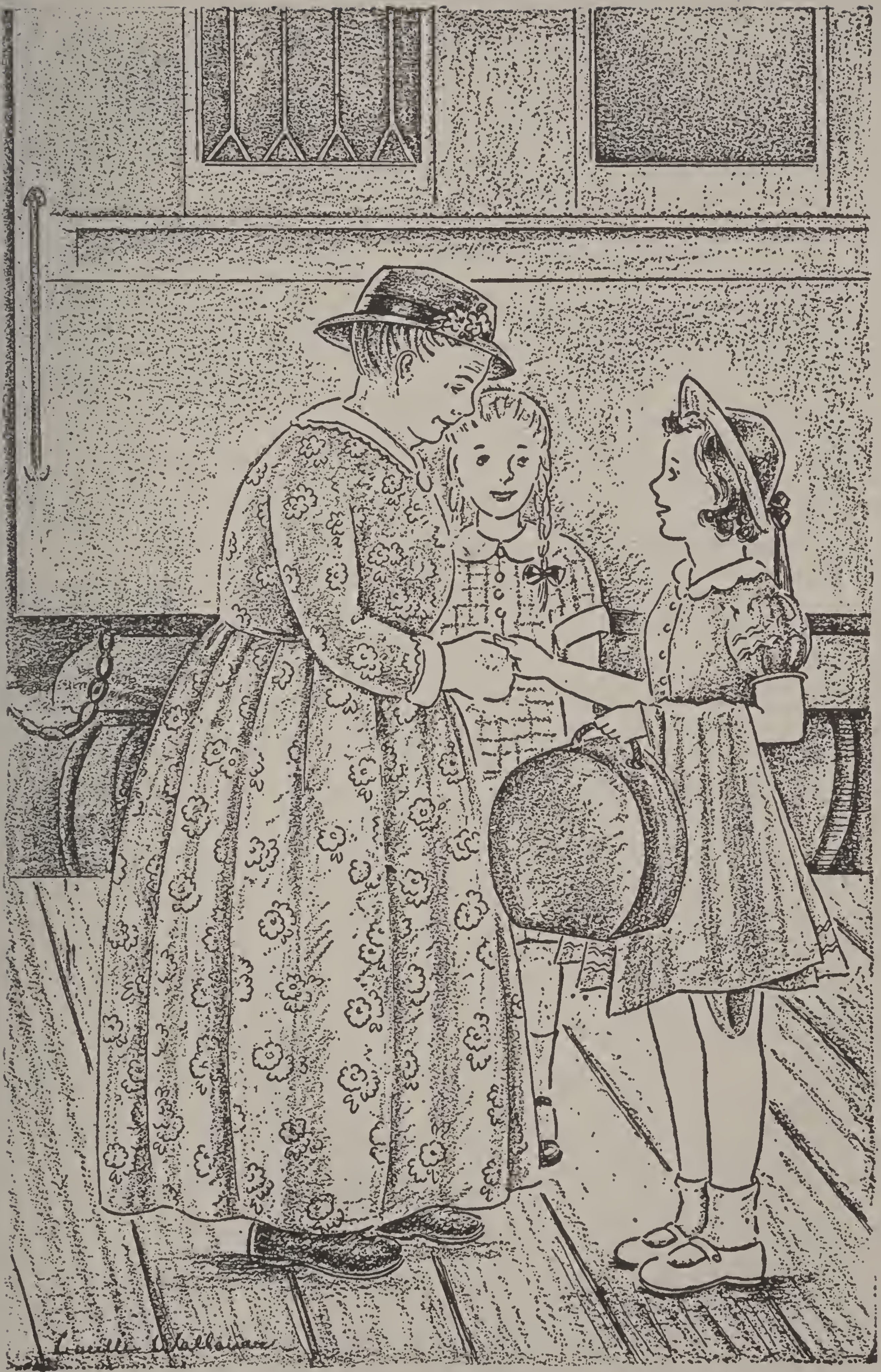
Betty gave a hurried, excited glance. It seemed to her that a vivacious fairy with dark brown curly hair and sparkling gray-blue eyes had suddenly dropped down out of the blue sky. Betty saw instantly that her city cousin was twenty times more wonderful than she had imagined.

Aunt Polly drew a long deep breath, lifted her chin, and stepped forward smiling. "Well, here you are, Rosemary Brown, and we're right glad to see you."

"Yes, here I am," the astonished girl replied.

"I'm your Aunt Polly."

"You are! Why, yes, of course. I mean, how very wonderful it is to meet you," Rosemary stammered, trying to conceal her surprise, for she was not expecting quite such an enormous relation.


Lucille Wallower

"We're right glad to see you"

"And this is your cousin Betty," added Aunt Polly with a tone of pride.

Betty's face flushed crimson with excitement as Rosemary threw her arms around her and kissed her.

"It's wonderful to have you here," Betty smiled shyly.

"It's wonderful to be here," agreed Rosemary.

"But you almost fooled me," Betty added, "for you weren't carrying your umbrella."

Without taking time to reply, Rosemary dropped her shiny hatbox, gave Betty her coat, and ran back into the car, calling, "Please, Mr. porter, don't let the chauffeur or whatever you call him, step on the gas while I'm getting the things I've forgotten."

In her haste, Rosemary collided head-on with prim, old-maidish Miss Watson, who had carefully waited until everyone else had left the car. There was a cry of surprise as Miss Watson's immaculate traveling bag came rolling down the steps and the infuriated woman scrambled after it. Rosemary apologized, but Miss Watson would not listen. She scolded the porter instead.

When Rosemary next appeared, she had not only found her umbrella but also her shiny leather purse. Her hat was still at a dizzy angle after her recent collision. As she stepped to the platform, the porter drawled in an amused tone, "Here's some mo' of your baggage, Miss."

"Whew, that was a close call," Rosemary laughed as she again faced Betty.

Each girl was eager to find out what the other was like. Rosemary saw the broad smile that played across Betty's flushed face; the light brown hair, combed straight back from the forehead and hanging in two braids tied with red ribbon, the mild blue eyes, wide and happy; and even the few persistent freckles on her cheeks and nose. Most of all, Rosemary noted Betty's home-made dress, old-fashioned in its lines as dictated by Aunt Polly. But Betty, she saw, was too happy and excited to be at all self-conscious. Rosemary tried to understand the strangely beautiful face and the clothes that looked as if they had come from a trunk that had been closed for thirty years. "Betty's surely different," she was saying to herself, "but she's certainly beautiful. A bit shy and old-fashioned, maybe; but what a friendly girl."

"Let me have the check for your trunk," Aunt Polly interrupted Rosemary's thoughts, "and I'll see about having it delivered."

Betty, in the meanwhile, was trying to accustom herself to her cousin's expensive, lovely clothes and her dancing, vivacious eyes.

While Aunt Polly arranged with the stumpy Irish drayman for the delivery of the trunk, overnight bag, and hatbox, Rosemary began chattering excitedly, "You don't know how good it is to get out of that stuffy old train." As she spoke, she inhaled a long deep breath of the clean vibrant air. "I just know we're going to have a grand time together, Betty."

"Yes, I'm sure we are," Betty beamed.

Then Rosemary's voice suddenly changed to a lower tone, "Can we see the Old Man of the Mountain from here?"

"There he stands," Betty replied quietly, pointing across the top of three strings of sidetracked passenger coaches, and along the rows of houses that clung to the steep side of the mountain.

"How perfectly thrilling," exclaimed Rosemary. "I just can't wait until I'm close enough to make a face at him. Even from here he looks as if someone had been telling him to behave himself, for his left eye seems to be bandaged. Let's start climbing the mountain this minute."

"Our house is the very last one you can see, perched near the top of the hill."

"It looks about the size of a tiny wren house that one hangs in a tree. I didn't know you lived quite so near the clouds, Betty."

By this time Aunt Polly had finished with the baggage and came slowly down the platform. "That little chore is over with, and now, girls, let's be heading for home. You know, Rosemary, if I weren't sure of you in any other way, I'd know by your absent-mindedness that you're Dr. William Brown's daughter."

"Oh, no, Aunt Polly," Rosemary burst out laughing. "Nobody can share that honor with my Daddy-Doc, for everybody says he's in a class by himself."

"Well, we're all a little beside ourselves this morning," Aunt Polly grinned. "I just this minute discovered I've come off without wearing my precious jabot, and I never think of coming down town without it. What will the neighbors say? Come, let me carry your coat."

"No, thank you, I can manage it very nicely. But Aunt Polly, you're going to take a taxi home, aren't you? You look hot and tired, and so you take a taxi, and Betty and I will run on ahead and visit."

"Taxi, child," laughed Aunt Polly. "Sakes alive, I should say not. I wouldn't for the world trust myself in one of those crazy contraptions, going up that steep mountain. Bless your heart, Rosemary, I always walk."

"Please, Aunt Polly, I know you must be too tired to walk all the way."

"Well, if I feel tuckered out a bit, I'll stop in for a minute at one of the neighbors and rest. But this is the street we take," she added, starting to lead the way.

Rosemary was so anxious to get a closer view of the

Old Man of the Mountain that she and Betty began a merry chase up the steep winding street. Aunt Polly, hurry as fast as she could, was soon far behind them. As the girls raced along, Rosemary continued to chatter; "You can't realize, Betty, how good it seems to be away from the smoke and heat of the city, and so near the lake and the woods. Oh, we shall have such fun!"

By this time the brisk hard climb was bringing the blood to Rosemary's cheeks, and her unbounded enthusiasm made Betty extremely happy.

"I know ever so many interesting places to go," Betty confided.

Suddenly the Old Man of the Mountain loomed large above them. Rosemary stopped to study the face, saying, "He looks as if he might jump down beside us any minute."

"You know it always gives me a sort of creepy feeling to look him straight in the eye," Betty confided in a whisper.

"He certainly has a cold, unfriendly look," said Rosemary. "The unequal turrets make his cap set a little over his left ear, as if he were a bit tipsy, and his mouth is too wide and straight, and it turns down in a sulk at the corners. He must be a lonely creature. Just the same, he fascinates me."

On and on they climbed, past long rows of houses that seemed to be playing leapfrog with one another over the protruding rocks. In their excitement, the girls did not notice how completely out of breath they were. At last Betty turned in from the street and said proudly, "This is where I live, Rosemary."

Rosemary stopped to rest and to look about her before going indoors. There was a tang of wildness about the entire surroundings that set her imagination ablaze. She turned and had another good look at the Old Man of the Mountain. Beyond a barbed wire fence, on the side of the mountain, there was a wide irregular stretch of wasteland grown to clumps of poplar, jack pine, and briars, from which great irregular patches of shelving rock protruded. The mountain was so steep above her that it made Rosemary dizzy to look up at it. She felt almost as if she were about to fall over backward.

In the distance she could just see glimpses of a rusting steel picket fence. As her eyes ran up the wide flight of steps leading to the veranda of the old hotel, she thought the steps seemed strangely like a dull brownish bow tie, and the veranda itself gave the impression of a stiff collar about the neck of the Old Man of the Mountain.

Filled with excited wonder, Rosemary followed Betty into the house, where she was greeted by the scent of old English lavender.

"Come on upstairs, Rosemary. I want you to see my room," urged Betty.

When they reached the bedroom, Rosemary was suddenly so tired that she flung herself across the tufted bedspread which Betty had smoothed so carefully and lovingly. Rosemary had not even noticed the spread. Instead, she rolled over, thus wrinkling it still more, and sighed, "Whew, but am I ever tired. I don't know whether I'm going to enjoy living quite so near the stars or not. All this climbing will probably be good for my digestion, as my Daddy-Doc would say."

"We like it here," Betty answered soberly.

"Can we see the Old Man from this window?"

As she spoke, Rosemary twisted about on the bed in order to look out of the window, and Betty's heart almost stopped beating when she saw the disarray of her prized bedspread. Sure enough, between the boughs of the maple tree that flourished just outside the window, Rosemary could see the cold staring eyes and the wide, tight-lipped mouth of the Old Man.

"Doesn't it give you a spooky feeling to live here all the while?" Rosemary asked. "This face seems like the eyes of my conscience after I've done something wrong, only it's a lot worse, and a hundred times more real. It sort of chills me, like a January fog."

"The eyes are always there," Betty agreed, "and the mountain is an unexplored land of mystery. Sometimes it makes me almost silly scared."

"And when do we start up the mountain to inspect the place?" Rosemary asked in a matter-of-fact manner.

"We don't start ever," Betty replied with quiet determination. "The place is too weird and mysterious to think of going any nearer than we are now."

"Surely you don't mean that, Betty? Why, it can't be that you're afraid. Now that I'm rested a bit let's get started. We'll make a personal call on the Old Man of the Mountain without further delay. What surprises me most is that you say you've lived here all your life, and yet you've never visited the place."

At this moment there was a bang of the door downstairs, and the sound of firm measured footsteps announced the safe arrival of Aunt Polly.

"How in the world," Rosemary asked, "does your mother manage to climb so high? I should think she would burst her heart or lungs or maybe her arteries."

"Don't fool yourself," Betty replied. "My mother is likely to outlast all of us. Dad says she's a regular furnace of energy."

"I wonder when that pudgy Irishman is coming with my luggage?" Rosemary asked as she began to move restlessly about the room. "If I had my trunk here and my things unpacked, I'd feel very much at home. But

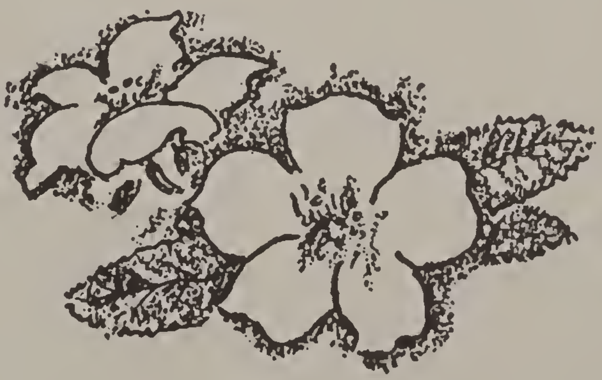
I won't feel really settled until we've made a formal call upon the Old Man of the Mountain."

Just as Betty was in despair because her cousin hadn't said a word about her room, Rosemary happened to notice the pretty vanity table: "Oh, Betty, how can you forgive me for not seeing how lovely your room is? I was so tired out, and besides, my mind was on the Old Man of the Mountain. Oh, what a beautiful vanity table!"

Tears welled up in Betty's eyes as she said modestly, "Maybe you won't believe it, but I made it all myself."

"And the sunny tint of the walls and the cheerful scatter rugs," and Rosemary chattered on in nervous excitement. "What a wonderful girl you are, Betty, to furnish such a room all by yourself."

"Thank you," Betty said in a slow sweet tone, trying to conceal her pleasure at Rosemary's admiration. "But now we had better go downstairs and help Mother with lunch."



4.

A QUESTION OF COURAGE

Rosemary was restless and excited throughout the morning, wishing that Aunt Polly would serve lunch early so that she could pay her visit to the Old Man of the Mountain.

As soon as Betty had finished helping with the morning chores, Rosemary began teasing her to go up the mountain. Betty said that she would go as far as the steel picket fence, which marked the halfway station up the mountainside, but not another step would she budge. She never had gone farther, and what was more, she never would.

"I know it would be too spooky, Rosemary," Betty added in a low tone. "Why, even the thought of going farther starts my imagination working until I can almost see ghosts right now."

"You talk like a fraidy-cat," Rosemary bantered. "And to think, I've come all the way from Chicago to see your town, and now that I'm here, you won't even go with me to the only place that's at all interesting."

"It isn't that I'm a coward," Betty answered firmly, "but I've lived here long enough to know that it's not the right thing to do under any circumstances. Plenty of people have tried it, and every single one of them was sorry afterwards. You don't know it, but even grown men hesitate to go beyond the steel picket fence. They stand on the shelf of granite at the halfway mark and enjoy the view of the lake and the town, but they never go one step farther."

"Of course, if that's the way you feel," Rosemary smiled, "we'll go only as far as the lookout today. We'll sit on the granite cliff and visit and lap up the view just the way a kitten laps milk."

"There are a dozen other things we could do on this first day of your visit that would be lots more interesting. I don't like to go even as far as the lookout without taking some grown person along."

In the end, Rosemary's insistence won out, as it usually did. Soon after lunch she and Betty went out of the house while Aunt Polly was still busy with the dishes.

"You know, really, I think we shouldn't go alone," whispered Betty, who was already a bit nervous.

"Oh, Betty, how can you think of hesitating on a day like this!" They soon reached the lower slopes of the mountain, and as Rosemary ducked through a fence, the back of her taffeta dress caught on the barbed wire. At the unexpected sound of the tearing silk, Betty almost collapsed from sheer fright. She slumped down in her tracks, on the verge of shrieking. Then remembering how Rosemary would banter her if she refused to go along, she quickly caught hold of herself. Jumping to her feet, she followed, as best she could, at the impetuous flying heels of her cousin.

As they clambered over the roots of a decaying pine stump, they came unexpectedly upon the Rogers brothers, neighbors of Betty, who were seated comfortably on a piece of shelving rock, tinkering with a model airplane. Tad, who was thirteen, had a mop of black hair across his forehead and a stubby, freckled nose; Hen, who was a year younger, was chubby and smiling and blue-eyed. Snooks, their mongrel Airedale and Collie, greeted the girls with a growl. Rosemary thought he was the homeliest dog she had ever seen. Even his tail was a misfit and wagged diagonally instead of up and down; and when he smiled, he lifted his upper lip so that he appeared to be snarling. The dog's strange expression, as he showed his teeth and flapped his tail, startled her, and she dodged behind Betty.

"It's only Snooks' way of bidding you welcome," Betty smiled.

"Yes, and he's a friendly dog, Snooks is," Tad assured her. "But where are you girls going, tearing along like a house afire?"

"We're going to visit the Old Man of the Mountain," Rosemary replied with unconcern.

"You're on your way to the madhouse, you'd better say," remarked Hen with emphasis.

"That remains to be seen," Rosemary grinned. She now looked sharply at the boys, whose faces were covered with freckles, their legs as brown as the earth beneath them, their shirts awry, and their caps misshapen. As she studied them, she couldn't quite understand why *they* should be panicky about anything.

"If you knew half as much about the place as we do, you wouldn't venture beyond the steel picket fence. On your life you wouldn't," Tad added emphatically.

"What is there that's so terrible, I'd like to know?" Rosemary asked, looking straight into Tad's eyes.

"We're not telling everything we know, for it's nobody's business."

"But you boys say you've been through the fence?"

"Yes, of course we have. You see we've been everywhere," snapped Tad, thinking Rosemary doubted his word. "We've been through once, and believe me, that was enough."

"Didn't I tell you?" Betty asked triumphantly. "It's no place for girls to go alone."

"But you boys are still alive and in your right minds and able to remember. Won't you please tell me what happened?" Rosemary continued, entirely ignoring Betty.

"We're keeping it to ourselves, thank you," Tad answered, twisting his mouth into a strange expression.

"Yes, and if ever you go," Hen added emphatically, "you'll be silent, too."

"You're only trying to fool me," Rosemary answered in an amused tone. "Don't you think I can see when someone is trying to frighten me? Maybe I am from the city, and perhaps I don't know much about the Old Man of the Mountain, but I surely know when I'm being kidded."

"And so you really think we're stringing you?" Tad asked in disgust. "Well, if you think so, go right ahead. Only be sure to mark the hole between the bent pickets so that you can make a flying get-away. And by the looks of your dress, you'll need to find a wide hole, or you won't have a stitch left on you by the time you get back."

"We're only giving you good and fair warning that you'll be in a bigger hurry to escape the Old Man of the Mountain than you are now to visit him," Tad added for good measure.

"But what's so terrible about him, I'd like to know?"

insisted Rosemary as she turned to look high above her.

Tad and Hen cast sidelong glances at each other, and they smiled in a queer way but didn't answer.

The truth was that they liked people to believe that they were braver than Hercules. This illusion might be destroyed if they told anyone how spooky they really thought the place was.

After an awkward silence, Tad suggested, "If you girls want a really exciting trip, Hen and I will act as your guides and take you to see the Stand Pipe. You can see it sticking up over there on Mt. Menard."

"That's what I suggested this morning," Betty again triumphed.

Rosemary looked in the direction that Tad pointed and saw a great stack crowning the peak, lifting its dark form into the low clouds.

"That'll give you and Betty plenty of adventure," added Hen hopefully. "It's at least an hour's walk, and you'll have to climb and climb till your knees are so wobbly that you think they won't ever carry you a step farther; but when you do get there, you can see for miles and miles."

"And on the way," Tad continued, "your breath comes hotter than Snooks' breath when he's been chasing snowshoe rabbits and is all worn out."

"But I don't want to go to the Stand Pipe, at least not today. What I do want right now is to visit the Old Man of the Mountain and tell him to his face how horrid he is to scare so many people. And if you boys were half as brave as you pretend, you'd go along and show me the best path to take."

At this moment the wind shifted, and from the direction of the castle there came a sound like the low wailing of a child in distress. Snooks stopped trying to smile. His tail became rigid, the long gray hair along his back bristled, and he growled menacingly.

"Do you hear that?" Betty said.

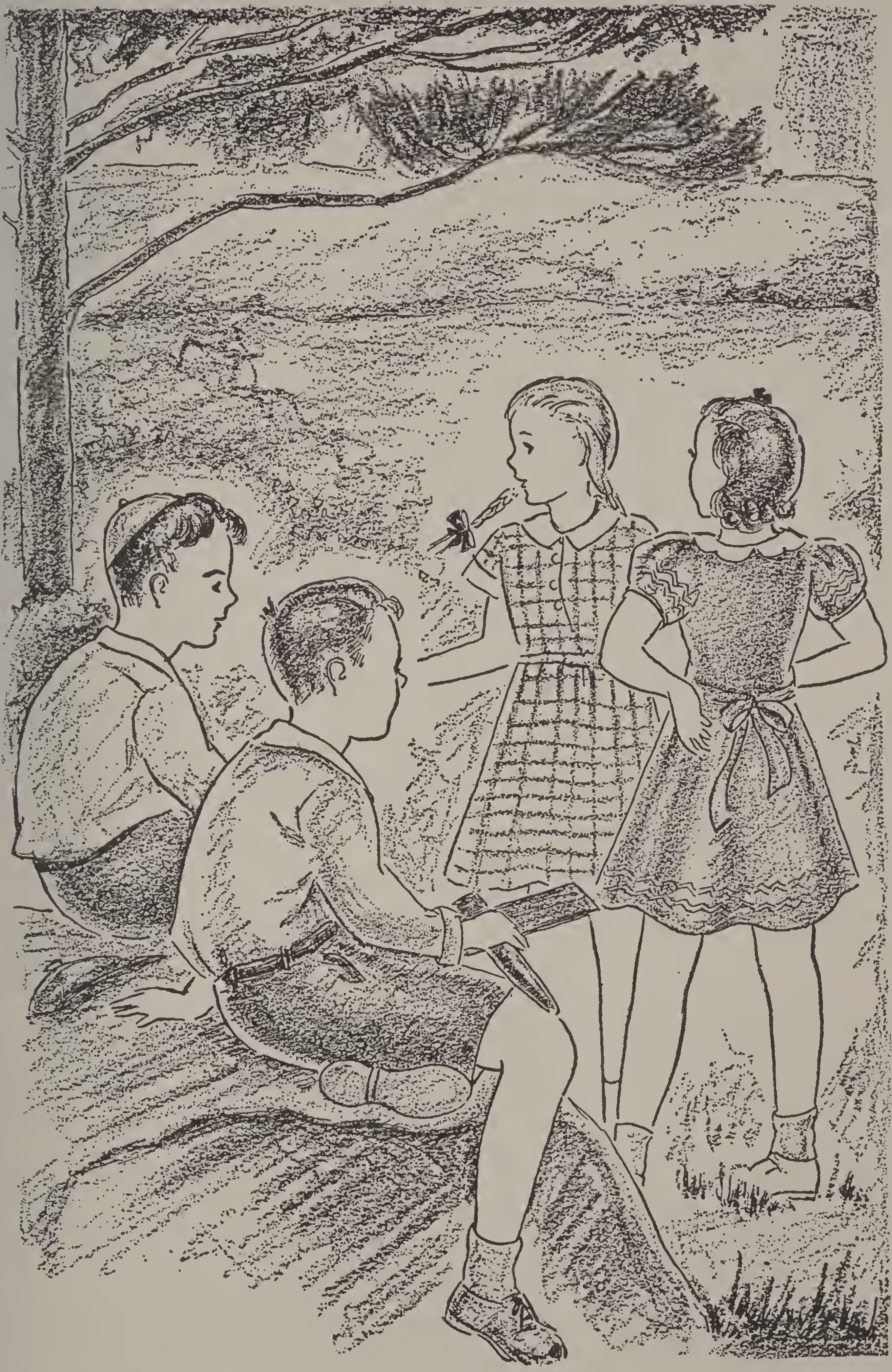
"Even Snooks has got common dog sense," scowled Tad, "and that's more than you girls have got."

"My Daddy-Doc's a surgeon, and I've often heard sounds a hundred times worse than that," laughed Rosemary, "and besides, I can't understand, for the life of me, why you all dread the place so much."

"This path you're on will lead you right up to the picket fence, Miss Know-It-All," grinned Tad in an attempt to hide his sudden panic. "And when you return, tell us what you find out."

"If you don't tell me all you know about the Old Man of the Mountain this minute," Rosemary said, impatiently stamping her foot, "I'll go and find out everything. But you'll never be any the wiser."

"You won't go either," Betty said firmly as Rosemary



"Do you hear that?" Betty said

turned on her heel. Betty caught her by the wrist and held her. "You don't think I'll allow you to visit such a spooky place, simply because you lack the good judgment to know when to be cautious."

During the tussle that followed, there was another sharp rent in Rosemary's taffeta dress. Betty proved the stronger; and when Rosemary found that she could not break away, she said, "All right. If the Old Man of the Mountain is as bad as you all think he is, I'll put off my visit until tomorrow. I know that Uncle Hiram will tell me what I want to know, when he comes home from work."

Rosemary was breathing deeply after the tussle, but she was not at all angry with Betty; rather, her respect for her cousin had greatly increased.

"You're a wise girl," Tad said with a grimace as he turned again to his model airplane. Snooks also expressed approval by showing his teeth and by beating the ground with his erratic tail.

"But we can at least climb as far as the cliff and sit there and look at the scenery," Rosemary said as she started up the trail.

When the girls were out of sight, Tad commented in disgust, "City girls certainly think they're some punkins, and nobody can tell them a thing; but I'll bet before long she'll find out more than she bargains for."

5.

THE UNINVITED GUEST

The two girls climbed the trail without once catching a glimpse of the Old Man of the Mountain, for they were walking under cover of the maples and the jack pines and around the jagged outcroppings of rock. When they reached the lookout they sat down, dangling their feet over the edge of the projecting rock, and surveyed the lake and the town. The great Ore Dock and the freighters seemed but parts of an artist's painting. They could not see the Old Man of the Mountain because of the towering cliff above them, but Rosemary was conscious of its nearness all the while. Two or three times she and Betty thought they heard strange noises, but they were never certain of their source. Rosemary was bursting with curiosity to know more about the old hotel; but each time she asked a question, Betty lifted her eyebrows and said, "You had better ask Dad about that tonight."

After a time the girls grew tired of looking at the scenery and started to retrace their steps along the winding path. Betty heard a sudden crackling noise among the jack pines. Someone is spying on us, she thought to herself.

When they reached the house, the girls went out on the small balcony over the front porch. Rosemary turned her eyes first in the direction of the giant face above her and then at the lake below her. Fascinated, she watched a great ore freighter glide silently around the end of the breakwater into the inner harbor until it came slowly and majestically to anchor beside the dock. A railway engine, with strained energy, was pushing twenty ore cars up the long hard incline and out on top of the steel Ore Dock. Beyond, topping a great crag of greenstone, loomed the lighthouse, and to the right, a sailboat shouldered smoothly into the breeze. The lake shone like deep blue porcelain, forming the background for the most beautiful natural picture that Rosemary had ever seen.

"This is all so beautiful, Betty," she exclaimed in admiration.

"We think it's lovely," Betty answered modestly.

After a while Rosemary turned to look at the great bowl that time had hollowed out from the surrounding hills. In this natural bowl lay the city of Marquette, its regular rows of business streets with their monotonous flat roofs appearing no larger than toys that a child might pick up in his hands. The automobiles scurrying along the streets resembled a colony of ants busy at their work. Beyond the business section there were rows and rows of dwelling houses, with here and there a church spire rising above them. The mottled brown and gray Lake Superior sandstone, from which many of the buildings were constructed, gave the scene a warm, mellow tone.

It was indeed a splendid picture, and years before, a professional artist had put his impression of it on canvas, with the title *The Bowl of Beauty*. Every now and then however, Rosemary's eyes turned from the beauty of this scene to the monstrous face that stared down from above.

"Do you suppose it was a child in distress that we heard early this afternoon?" she asked Betty for the fiftieth time.

"I don't suppose anything," Betty answered, quite out of patience. "Most likely it was a jibbering ghost."

"But, Betty, ghosts don't walk and talk except at night; and besides, if things are as bad as they seem, won't you go with me to search the place? If there really is a girl imprisoned there, we certainly can't sit idly by and do nothing."

"You shouldn't even make such a suggestion," Betty replied in a low cold tone. "We might be kidnapped ourselves, if we go too near."

"They'll never kidnap me, especially if I tell them who my Daddy-Doc is; for he isn't the kind of man to be trifled with! It takes more than an old vacant hotel that happens to look like a distorted human face, to frighten him. Or me."

"Rosemary, if you don't quit teasing me to go with you, I'll end by being sorry that you came to visit me. When I'm bursting with curiosity to hear about all the wonders of Chicago, you make me miserable with your everlasting questions about the Old Man of the Mountain."

"I'm sorry, Betty. You see I'm so fascinated with the mystery that I can hardly wait another minute to start racing up the mountain to find out the entire secret. But for your sake, I suppose I'll have to stop asking questions and wait until Uncle Hiram gives us permission to go."

"But you don't understand," Betty cautioned. "You must be careful what you say to my dad. I have promised him that I would never go beyond the steel picket fence. It will be best not to tell him that we were up at the granite lookout this afternoon and that we heard something that sounded like the wailing of a child in pain, or he may forbid us to go even as far as the lookout again, unless he or Mother would go with us."

"But you sound so childish, Betty."

"And you're so sure of yourself, Rosemary, that I'm afraid you'll do something rash and get us both into trouble."

"For your sake, Betty, I'll be careful. So there, now! Don't worry," promised Rosemary, patting Betty's shoulder. "I know I must seem terribly selfish, but I do so much want to go and investigate."

"Please don't think me a coward," begged Betty. "You'll understand me better after you've been here a few days. Only promise me that you won't do anything that we'll both be sorry for."

"But what shall I say to Uncle Hiram?"

"Simply ask him to tell you about the Old Man of the Mountain, how the hotel came to be built, and how it happens to be standing empty and looking so deserted and decayed. Get him started talking about its past history, and then maybe he'll tell you some of the secrets you're so curious to know."

"Shall I tell him what you've already told me?"

"No. I would just ask for information."

"Very well, now don't fret about it another minute, for Uncle Hiram shall know nothing that you don't tell him yourself," Rosemary promised.

At this moment Tyne Trunella came clambering up the street, whistling shrilly. When she saw Betty and Rosemary, she shouted, "Hello, Betty, I'm coming up!"

"Come on, I want you to meet somebody," Betty answered.

Rosemary looked at the shapeless overgrown girl, whose severe boyish bob gave her rawboned features a masculine appearance.

"And who is this terrible Turk?" Rosemary grinned as Tyne came banging in at the kitchen door.

"Her father is an ore puncher at the dock and works under my dad, and they're rather poor," Betty confided in a whisper.

As Tyne came bouncing out on the porch, panting from her exertion, Betty said politely, "This is my cousin Rosemary from Chicago."

Rosemary saw at a glance that Tyne was the kind of girl who always makes herself at home wherever she is. Her manners were those of the camel in the old fable, always edging her way into everything and edging everyone else out, without ever considering whether or not she was wanted.

"You must know something about the Old Man of the Mountain, too," Rosemary began.

"Of course, I've always known about the Old Man; and what surprises me is that you are so excited and crazy about the place. The hotel has been standing right where it is for nearly fifty years, and so far as I know, it's never exactly jumped down and harmed anybody. But of course, we all have enough common sense to stay far enough away so that it doesn't have a chance."

"So you're scared of the Old Man, too," Rosemary smiled quizzically.

"No! A hundred times, no!" Tyne trumpeted. "I'm distinctly not afraid. I'm simply acquainted with the Old Man; and when you're acquainted with folks, you know what you can do with them and what you can't do. It so happens that the better you know the Old Man of the Mountain, the farther you stay away from him, that's all."

"And just how does this differ from being afraid?" Rosemary asked impertinently.

"It's merely a matter of using your bean, as Tad says."

"Have you ever been beyond the steel picket fence?" Rosemary continued.

"Yes, once, and fortunately, I ran just in time. If I'd been a minute later, I'm afraid there'd be no Tyne left today to tell the story."

"Somebody evidently chased you."

"Yes, and no. I only said I ran; and I ran because I wanted to run, that's all."

"But what was it that made you want to run?"

"Since you must know so much, it will be best if you go yourself some day and find out," Tyne answered with a show of feeling.

"You're exactly like all the others. You simply make me sick!" Rosemary answered, quite out of patience. "The entire neighborhood seems to be made up of boys and girls who are afraid."

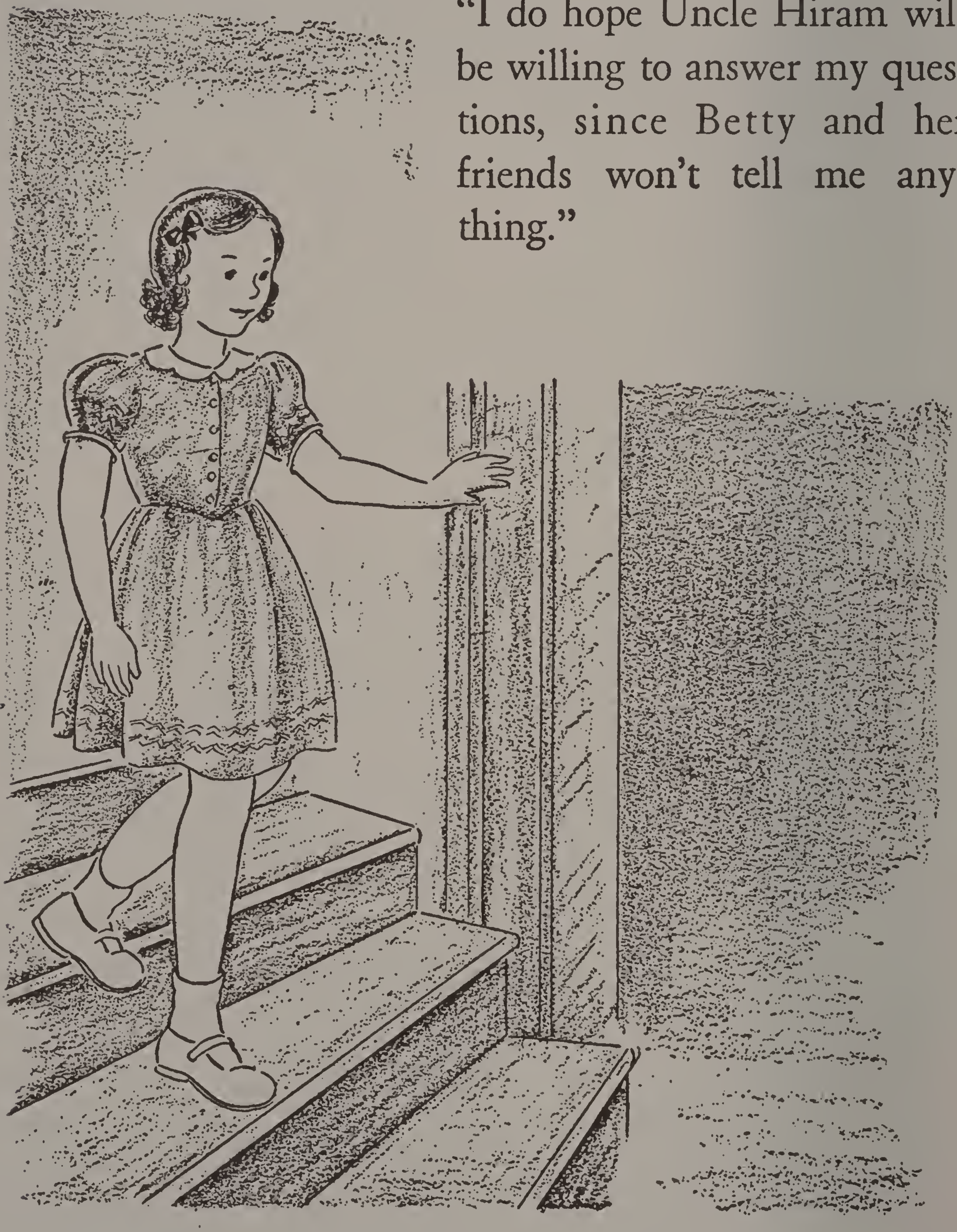
"I'd be mad with you and make you sorry for what you've just said, if you weren't so funny," Tyne smiled. "You know, Tad says you act like a puppy that's not yet reached her seventh day and hasn't yet got her eyes open. After you've been here long enough to find your way around alone, you'll probably develop better judgment."

"Tyne is right," Betty agreed, "and after a few days you'll not only use better judgment, but better manners, too, if you don't mind my telling you."

Rosemary gulped, realizing that her intense curiosity had caused her to be discourteous. "Excuse me, Betty and Tyne," she apologized, "for my Daddy-Doc told me, the last thing before I left, not to forget my manners. I can see now that I have forgotten them, and I do want you and Betty to pardon me for even suggesting that you are afraid."

Just then Betty saw her father hurrying home from work. She was worn out trying to curb Rosemary and was glad that she would now be relieved of the task. "Here comes my dad, and he'll want to meet you right away, Rosemary."

As Rosemary went downstairs, she said to herself, "I do hope Uncle Hiram will be willing to answer my questions, since Betty and her friends won't tell me anything."



6.

AN EVENING OF ACCIDENTS

As Rosemary ran through the kitchen on her way to greet Uncle Hiram, her toe caught against the leg of Aunt Polly's stool and sent a pan of potatoes flying across the floor.

"Oh, Auntie, I'm so sorry; do let me pick them up."

"Run along and greet your Uncle Hiram," Aunt Polly laughed, "and Betty will attend to the potatoes."

Out into the street Rosemary raced, calling, "Hello, Uncle Hiram!"

Suddenly she stopped short, thinking that the man coming toward her, with rusty-brown face and hands, was surely some gypsy or Indian.

"Well, Rosemary, I figure you don't quite know me," Uncle Hiram smiled, "I guess you're fooled by the iron ore dust."

"Of course it's you, Uncle Hiram," Rosemary replied, making a low curtsy, but not offering to take his hand.

"Just you wait, a cake of soap and a tub of water can work miracles, and you'll be as proud of me as I am of you," he chuckled as he led the way to the kitchen door.

"I'm sure of it," Rosemary happily agreed.

"How's Dr. Will—I mean your father?" he asked as he set his dinner pail on the kitchen table. "He's as busy as ever, I suppose."

"My Daddy-Doc is fine as a fiddle. At least that's what he always says when people ask him."

"He's always been like that. And you're having a good time with your Aunt Poll and Betty, I hope," Uncle Hiram continued.

Betty was busy setting the table, filling the glasses, and doing the other small duties that were hers at mealtime. She glanced up from her work long enough to ask her father, "Does Rosemary look anything like what you thought she would?"

"Yes," he answered, "only she's considerably taller than I had imagined. Of course I figured she'd look exactly like the Browns, and I was right, for she's the very spittin' image of what my sister Martha was at her age, and Martha was the best looking Brown that ever was known—not counting you, Betty. My, but it's good to see you, Rosemary, and I only wish that Will was here with you."

"Oh, thank you, Uncle Hiram, and I can see that you look exactly like a Brown, too."

"But don't be too harsh in your judgment. Just you wait till I scour three or four coats of this plaguey iron dust off me and get on some clean clothes, and then I'll be surprised if you're not as proud of me as Poll is," he ended with a chuckle.

"Well, Hiram Brown, you're not such a bad old pill, for all your bragging," Aunt Polly grinned as she put a pan of biscuits into the oven. "But get along to your bath, or you'll be late for supper."

"At first I did think you were a sure enough Indian," Rosemary giggled.

"I could see that with half an eye," Uncle Hiram beamed, starting up the stairs.

"And now let me help, too," Rosemary said as she began placing the chairs about the table.

After a few minutes Aunt Polly called upstairs in a hearty good humor, "Hiram Brown, supper's been spoiling this quarter hour! Get a move on and hurry down here if you want anything to eat!"

As Rosemary heard Uncle Hiram coming downstairs, she took one more look at the Old Man of the Mountain, now flooded with an aura of light from the setting sun. She whispered to Betty, "The sun is kind to the Old Man of the Mountain this evening. Look at the beautiful picture splashed across the clouds for him to enjoy."

Uncle Hiram's face now shone like a polished mirror, and his clothes were neat and clean. He called out in high spirits, "Now, Rosemary, I'm ready for that kiss you were going to give me as you came skipping down the street."

A few moments later they were seated at the table and Uncle Hiram was saying grace. Rosemary thought she heard the words "Bless Uncle Will," but she wasn't sure, for her uncle spoke in a low, indistinct tone. When he had finished, Uncle Hiram drew his chair a few inches closer to the table, saying in a happy mood, "You're going to make yourself right at home with us, Rosemary. I've never yet known a Brown that was bashful when it comes to eating. Poll, you and Betty see that Rosemary has plenty, for I sometimes get so busy eating that I plumb forget everybody else. My outdoor work gives me an appetite as big as the hold of an ore boat."

"You talk just like Daddy-Doc," Rosemary smiled, feeling that she was already one of the family. "Aunt Polly, your hot biscuits and fresh honey are simply delicious."

"And now *you* sound like a Brown," Aunt Polly replied, "but these biscuits don't seem nearly as light as usual."

"They're the best I've ever tasted," Rosemary added, remembering her best manners. She wished that her Daddy-Doc could hear her now. Rosemary felt that she was not exaggerating the least bit, for romping up and down the mountain in the clean bracing air had given her a ravenous appetite.

Uncle Hiram had just finished his third cup of coffee and had entirely lost count of the biscuits he had eaten, when Aunt Polly explained briefly, "Hiram, I'm sorry, but you'll have to make a trip to the store, for we're all out of flour. A twenty-four-pound sack will do this time. We also need some sugar and bread and butter."

For an instant a look of surprise came into his face, but soon he got stiffly to his feet. "This is almost worse than inviting the mailman for a walk after supper," he said, smiling.

"Please, Aunt Polly, can't I help with the dishes?" asked Rosemary. Without waiting for a reply, she carried two plates to the kitchen sink. A few minutes later, as Rosemary reached for a towel to dry the dishes, Aunt Polly saw the long rent down the back of her taffeta dress.

"My goodness, child, what's happened to you? There's a tear two feet long down the back of your dress and there's a zigzag piece missing from the side of your skirt!"

"Surely it can't be as bad as that," Rosemary answered.

"Betty, where on earth have you taken Rosemary?"

Betty went on with her work and said nothing.

"I'll bet you've been up the mountain. And you know, Betty, you're not supposed to go there without permission."

"We were part way up the mountain," Rosemary answered, "but Aunt Polly, the fault was entirely mine, and I'll take all the blame for it. I simply teased Betty until she had to go with me. Betty told me plainly enough she didn't want to go, but I made her go."

"And why were you so anxious to go?" Aunt Polly asked pointedly, trying to become acquainted with the impetuous girl.

"I was curious, that's why," Rosemary answered truthfully. "I wanted to visit the Old Man of the Mountain, and when Betty told me how spooky and mysterious the place was, I wanted to go all the more."

"And how far did you go?"

"Oh, not very far. While we were clambering up over the rocks, we came upon Tad and Hen, sitting behind a great granite cliff, working on some kind of model airplane, and so we stopped and talked with them."

"We did go on as far as the Lookout," added Betty, "and sat there a long time and visited."

"It's mighty lucky you didn't go any farther," Aunt Polly said in a most emphatic tone.

"Why?" asked Rosemary excitedly.

"Don't you know how unsafe it is up there?"

"I don't believe one could exactly fall off the mountain. At least the Old Man of the Mountain seems to sit tight enough," Rosemary answered, hoping to get additional information.

"Fall off!" Aunt Polly chuckled in surprise. "No, child, not that."

"What then?"

"You'll have to ask your Uncle Hiram about that!"

"But haven't you ever been there yourself, Aunt Polly?"

"Gracious no, child; what would I want to go to a place like that for?"

"How do you know it's so unsafe, then?"

"Haven't I lived right here for twenty years, come this September?" asked Aunt Polly, with a smile spreading over her face.

"But you say you've never been near the place," Rosemary persisted.

"But if one knows about a place, one knows!" Aunt Polly showed her feeling by washing the dishes faster.

"But if nobody will tell me about the place, is it any wonder that I'm curious and excited and want to investigate for myself?"

"Your Uncle Hiram will probably tell you, if you ask him. But the thing you should be more curious and excited about is your torn dress!"

"Yes, I know. I wouldn't have worn this dress if only the expressman had brought my trunk. But I won't let it happen again."

Rosemary had become so absorbed in the subject of the Old Man of the Mountain that she absent-mindedly dropped the dinner plate she was drying. It crashed at her feet.

"Oh, Aunt Polly, I'm so sorry. I'll buy you another plate just like this one in the morning. Indeed, I will!"

Aunt Polly's face showed disappointment in spite of herself, and she seemed to be gurgling sentences in her throat. For the moment she couldn't speak.

"How much did it cost? Would a dollar buy another plate just as good?" Rosemary asked, more and more upset, as she watched the color fade from Aunt Polly's face.

"Oh, it's nothing to fret about, and besides I have a hundred other plates," Aunt Polly answered, trying not to hurt Rosemary's feelings. In spite of all she could do, however, a tear rolled down her cheek, and she quickly brushed it off with the corner of her apron.

The truth was that this was the last piece of chinaware in the set that had belonged to Aunt Polly's mother, and the breaking of this plate was like the breaking of a close tie with the past.

"It must have been my curiosity about the Old Man of the Mountain, and the thought of my torn dress," Rosemary apologized. "Really, I'm so ashamed, for I do know how to dry dishes perfectly well, and if you don't believe me, I'll prove it tomorrow."

"Don't think a thing more about it," smiled Aunt Polly, getting herself under control. "Accidents do happen in the best of families, you know."

While she was speaking, there was a rasp of boot leather on the step and in came Uncle Hiram, bearing a heavy load of provisions. As he set his bundles on the kitchen table, he beamed, "Well, a trip like this doesn't make one exactly envious of Santa Claus!"

Rosemary's eyes danced with anticipation. Now she would surely hear the thrilling story of the Old Man of the Mountain.

7.

THE OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN

Uncle Hiram had scarcely seated himself in the wicker chair in the parlor when Rosemary began earnestly, "Aunt Polly promised me you would tell me all about the Old Man of the Mountain. I mean about the mystery."

Uncle Hiram cast a quick suspicious glance at his wife, as he asked in surprise, "Poll, what made you suggest such a story just before bedtime? It'll keep the girls awake all night."

"I didn't suggest it," Aunt Polly smiled broadly, "Rosemary's more curious than the cat that lost her nine lives, if you want to know. You can see for yourself how she's ruined her perfectly beautiful taffeta dress while trying to visit the Old Man of the Mountain. Not only that, but she spilled potatoes all over the kitchen, and worst of all, she broke a dinner plate. We'll all be out of house and home," she chuckled, "or she'll be without a decent stitch to cover her back if her curiosity isn't satisfied pretty soon."

"Well, if it's as bad as all that," Uncle Hiram said seriously, looking at Rosemary and wondering just what kind of girl she was, "I think we'll have to end her curiosity once and for all."

"Oh, thank you," beamed Rosemary, "I was never so excited about anything in all my life. It hurts me 'way down inside like cayenne pepper, only worse, much worse."

"I'm afraid you won't sleep any after hearing about it, and I'm ashamed to be the cause of any such calamity."

"I'm sure I won't sleep half a wink if you *don't* tell me," Rosemary urged, "so there you are."

"It's such a long story that I don't know exactly where to begin," Uncle Hiram remarked as he cleared his throat.

"Begin at the very beginning," Rosemary urged, too excited to keep quiet, "and don't skip a single incident, and don't you dare stop till you come to the very end, for I want to know everything."

"Rosemary's a regular Brown, there's no doubt about that!" remarked Aunt Polly, "and when she wants to know a thing, she wants all the details. There'll be no peace around here until you tell her all that's known."

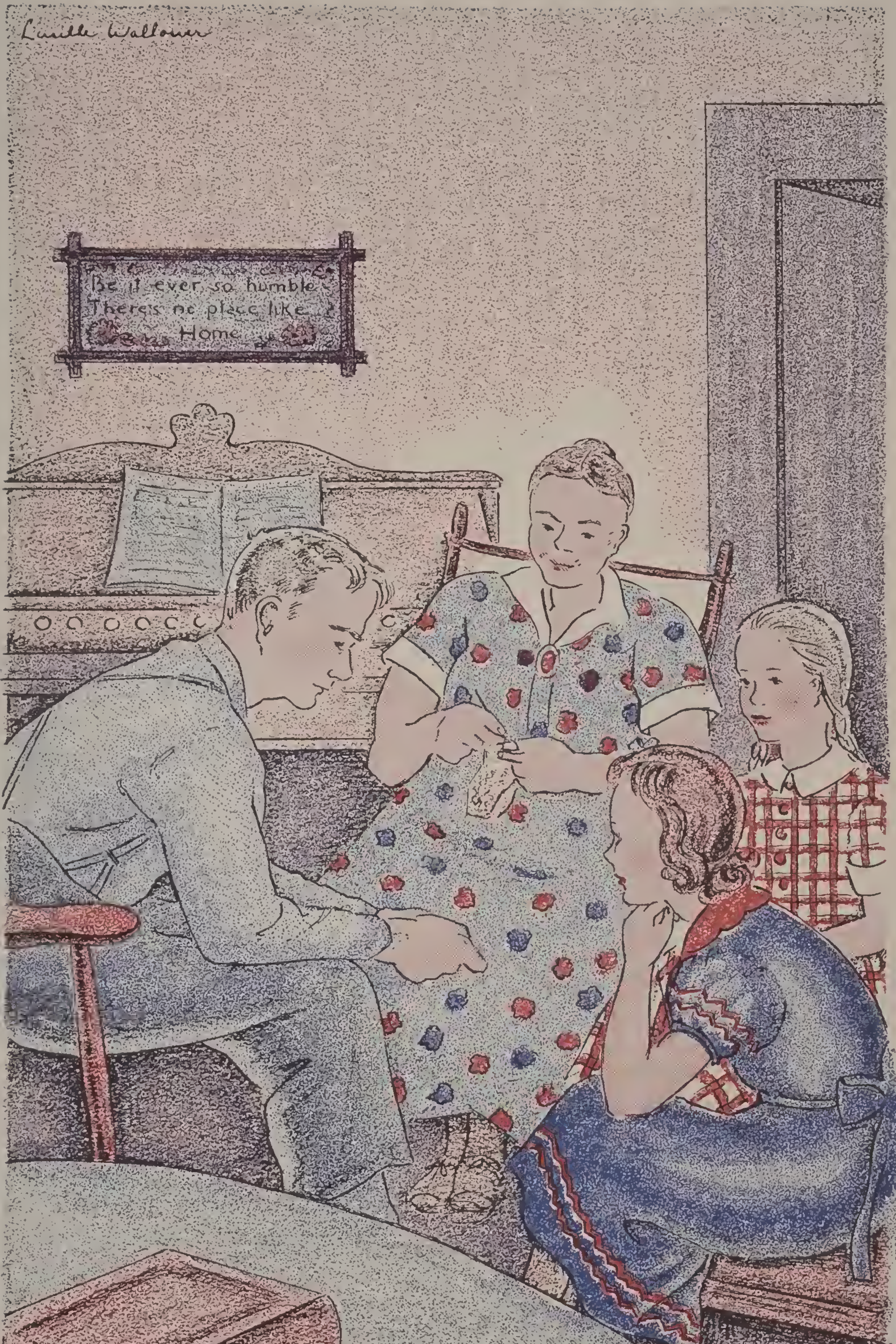
"Oh, thank you, Aunt Polly," Rosemary added eagerly.

"Let me see. Let me see." Uncle Hiram settled down comfortably in his chair, crossed his legs, and partly closed his eyes in a dreamy stare.

Seeing that he was ready to begin, Rosemary slipped far out on the edge of her chair, caught her heels over the rung, set her elbows on her knees and placed her chin in her hands. Now she was all ready for the story. Betty, noting what was about to happen, grew tense. She had heard parts of the story and knew how stirring it would be to live the incidents over again. She leaned back in her chair, clutching its arms in her hands. Aunt Polly took up a doily that she was crocheting, and her nimble hands began to move.

"It was forty-nine years ago this past April when it all began. A Mr. Harding from Chicago, Craig Harding to be exact, came to Marquette to find a location, or rather a retreat. You see this was in the good old days when there were no doctors here in town. A Doctor Hewitt from Cleveland, after visiting every health resort east of the Rocky Mountains, had pronounced Marquette and this vicinity the most healthful spot anywhere in the Middle West. Why, this place was so blamed healthful that when anybody wanted to die he had to move back south to Chicago or Detroit, in order to find the chance to shuffle off."

"How interesting!" Rosemary exclaimed.


Lucille Wallower
Be it ever so humble
There's no place like
Home

"It was forty-nine years ago when it all began"

"That's the gospel truth," Uncle Hiram continued, giving Rosemary a sidelong glance to see whether she believed what he was saying. "The clean, ozone-laden air swept down out of Alaska and Hudson Bay, as clear and sparkling as the stars, and as invigorating as a modern ultra-violet ray machine.

"Well, this Craig Harding had been a big hotel man in Chicago, so he said, and had gotten into the habit of living too fast. Not only that, but he'd been forced for so long to breathe the foggy scummy air off the Chicago River and the dust and grime from factory chimneys and smokestacks that you couldn't exactly blame him for getting sick."

"But Chicago isn't at all like that!" Rosemary protested.

Uncle Hiram's eyes narrowed, as he looked closely at Rosemary. At this instant she remembered that the Browns didn't tolerate contradiction or question when they were telling a story, so she placed her fingers firmly across her mouth and sat speechless.

"At the time Craig Harding lived there, Chicago was a much worse place than it is today," continued Uncle Hiram. "The doctors told him that he'd contracted tuberculosis, and if he valued his life for as much as a plugged nickel, he'd better clear out, and make his home in some healthier climate.

"As I said, the newspapers at that time were full of wonderful stories about the newly discovered Fountain of Youth, the Queen city of the North Country, the air-cooled roof garden of the world, as they called it. The climate of Marquette was said to be the great cure-all, the natural restorer of each man's strength and every woman's beauty.

"After reading a number of these stories, it wasn't any wonder that Craig Harding finally landed in Marquette.

"When he stepped off the train here at the little wooden station, he was a sorry-looking specimen. His face was the color of skimmed milk, and his eyes were as heavy as iron ore, with great dark circles under them like ore dust. His clothes were a half-mile too big for him, showing that he had evidently lost weight pretty fast.

"Craig Harding carried a large gold-headed cane and wore a derby hat. He looked the part of a perfect aristocrat, even to the limp in his left leg; and everybody, of course, judging him by his manner, thought that he was quite a personage.

"As soon as he got his first sniff of Lake Superior air, he began to hold up his head and feel better. He lifted his chest, and the golden ozone poured into him like clean water into a ship's hold, pushing out the smoky air he had been breathing for so long. Before a month had passed, he had gotten rid of his hacking cough altogether and had begun to sleep like a knot on a pine log and to eat enough to founder a ravenous wolf. It wasn't long before his clothes were the right size again, and he looked the part of a distinguished gentleman.

"One thing people soon discovered about him, which they hadn't seen at first, was that he wore a full beard so that his face was completely covered. But when his face took on a healthy tan, they began to notice a long scar across his left cheek that was clearly visible because it still kept the color of skimmed milk.

"Everyone speculated a lot as to what had happened to the man whose dagger had come so close to taking Craig Harding's life; but discussing the subject was as far as they ever got, for Craig Harding kept his mouth closed as tight as a vise about anything in his past life.

"Soon he soaked up so much energy that he began to hanker for something to do. He began to feel that he, himself, was the best possible advertisement for the Lake Superior climate, so he wrote back to the Chicago doctors and bragged Marquette up as the greatest Fountain of Youth anywhere in the Western Hemisphere, if not in the entire Milky Way. You'd have thought he was going to start another Barnum's Circus by the noise he made.

"The doctors wrote back, so he said, advising him to build a hotel, and they promised to keep it full with patients who needed just such a wonderful climate as he described.

"Almost overnight Craig Harding became excited over this idea, but he kept his plans absolutely to himself. When he did say anything about business prospects in Marquette, he always belittled the town. In searching around for the proper location for his hotel, he soon became a familiar sight to all, with his gold-headed cane and his derby hat and his sparkling diamond ring and his Scotch tweed suit. He was such a good actor, though, that nobody even so much as guessed what he was planning to do.

"And then one day after he had walked everywhere else in his thorough search, he trudged up this long steep mountain, and when he reached the top of old Harkins he was so tired out that he sat down on a granite boulder to rest. It was only natural that his attention was drawn to the encircling hills and mountains and the dim purple mist of the distant horizon. Soon his eyes turned to the glowing silent waters of Lake Superior. There happened, at the moment, to be a four-masted sailing vessel coming into the harbor with her rigging all out, and in imagination he rode lightly atop the highest mast till the ship had docked.

"Men were waiting with wheelbarrows, and they began pushing the reddish-brown iron ore out along the dock to the hungry hold of the vessel. They were so far below the boulder where Craig Harding sat that they looked for all the world like a busy colony of ants.

"Next his gaze wandered to the hollowed Bowl of Beauty at his left, and he saw that the main street was showing vigorous signs of life. 'Marquette 'll be a great city some day,' he mumbled to himself as he excitedly thumped his cane against the rock. 'All the things that are being said and written about the place will be coming true before anyone knows what is happening.'

"Then Craig Harding suddenly got to his feet and began looking around him. 'I figure,' he said to himself, 'that right here is the exact spot for my hotel. What a tonic this outlook will be for wearied minds, shocked and worn by city life. This air and this scenery will work more cures than all the doctors' prescriptions. Yes,' he continued as he looked down the mountainside, 'and here's a natural approach for the horses and carriages.' As he spoke he began sighting along his outstretched cane in an effort to locate some landmark on the shore drive beneath him, where the road should begin.

"That very evening Craig Harding hired Bert Collins who, as everybody knew, had little money, to buy the top of Harkins Mountain as well as the land for the approaching carriage road. Craig Harding was canny enough to know that if he tried to buy the land himself, the owner would stick the price up beyond reason.

"Late that fall Craig Harding went back to Chicago, and early the next spring, before the snow was entirely off the ground, he came back, bringing an architect with him. This fellow sketched a wonderful castle, something like one he had seen in Europe on a crag along the Rhine.

"Soon the carpenters and masons were hard at work, and never before nor since were there so many workmen engaged on a single building in our North Country.

"After two years the hotel was finished, and it was the most wonderful structure north of Milwaukee. The lobby, with its overhanging beams, was done in walnut. The massive fireplaces were made of mottled gray and red Lake Superior sandstone and Marquette greenstone. There was a wide circular staircase that led from the lobby to the various floors, to each of the observation balconies, and to the topmost turrets.

"While the structure was under construction, every able-bodied man, woman, and child in town trudged up the sloping carriage road to satisfy their curiosity about it.

"You can judge the size of the hotel when I tell you that it took forty-seven carloads of furniture to fit out the various rooms.

"When visitors began to arrive, Craig Harding, with his aristocratic manners, stood outside the main entrance and, with his gold-headed cane, pointed out the varied aspects of the natural beauty of the outlook.

"Nobody, of course, paid the least attention to what he was trying to show them, for they had climbed the mountain solely to see the marvelous architecture, the gorgeous draperies, and the showy furniture. They were, in fact, so entirely accustomed to the natural beauty everywhere about them that they never even stopped to look at it.

"There was just one person who was enthusiastic over the beauty of the outlook. This was a widow, Sally Payne, who pretended to write nature poetry. When Craig Harding remarked to her about the beauty, she replied, 'Yes, indeed! How truly grand and marvelous! It reminds me of Lord Byron's "from crag to crag," don't you know! I don't believe there's anything like it this side of Venice!' The trouble was that Craig Harding couldn't stop her raving, once he had her started, and of course he soon got tired of her neurotic nonsense and almost had to shoo her away with his cane.

"Finally, in disgust, at the blindness of the people hereabouts, he had a great granite boulder mounted on a base of cement, and on its face he set a bronze tablet. The inscription can still be read, I suppose, if it's not entirely overgrown with moss or poison ivy:

MAN HAS BUILDED THE CASTLE
BUT
THE MOUNTAIN AND THE LAKE
ARE THE HANDIWORK
OF GOD

"There was a tradition that Craig Harding had placed a curious copper box containing some valuable papers, in the center of the boulder, but nobody ever knew for certain about this.

"When the hotel was finally opened for business, the trains began bringing carload after carload of nervous and tired people from the city, and also hay fever patients, as well as any number of adventurers.

"Craig Harding had everything organized here just as he had done in the city. His coachmen, who went down to meet the trains, and his bellhops at the hotel all wore showy livery. They looked as though they'd just jumped off the ironing board, they were that spick and span.

"At first things seemed to be moving along wonderfully, but the second summer was not quite so good. And then a few years later there was a panic throughout the country, and the hotel was two-thirds empty.

"People throughout the town began to whisper that Craig Harding had a white elephant on his hands, and they wondered how in the world he'd ever get rid of it.

"Things rapidly went from bad to worse for nearly ten years, until at last the coachmen were dismissed, and the bellhops—there were only two left—went about in their shirt sleeves without any sort of uniform at all.

"There was a lot of talk that Craig Harding was worse than bankrupt, and people whispered that they knew he could never keep open another season.

"And then the next thing the town heard was that Craig Harding was missing. The news ran like wildfire from one street corner to the next. His name was on everybody's lips; and when time went on without his being found, the papers began to carry black scareheads. Soon his disappearance had become a nationwide mystery.

"The evening before his strange disappearance, Craig Harding, in accordance with his usual habit, had sat in his huge leather rocker before the great sandstone fireplace with his few guests. He was naturally a good story teller, and on this particular evening he was at his best.

"Promptly at ten o'clock, he bade his guests goodnight and went to his private suite of rooms overlooking the lake. The moon had just risen over the lake and had turned everything into a world of wonder and mystery.

"Next morning, when breakfast was served, Craig Harding was not in his usual place at the head of the table. As the guests filtered into the dining room, they began to ask one another if they had heard strange noises sometime after midnight. They had all heard them, but had merely supposed that someone had been drinking and had gotten quarrelsome, so they had paid no more attention.

"After breakfast one of the bellhops was sent to call Craig Harding. He began by knocking gently, and then louder and louder; and when he had no response he turned the doorknob and, strangely enough, the door opened. It had been Craig Harding's unfailing habit to lock his door with a special night latch, and in addition to bolt it securely.

The bellhop found that every drawer in the massive chiffonier, dresser, and wardrobe had been pulled out and emptied in the center of the floor. Every pocket in the two suits of clothes left hanging in the wardrobe had been turned inside out. In his fright the bellhop sounded an alarm, and the guests came in to help solve the mystery.

"It was soon discovered that a Miss Harriet Fairfax was also missing. She had been a summer boarder at the hotel for three seasons, and had registered as coming from Chicago. She had always been a strange secretive person, who wore her clothes as neat as a pin but who seemed dreamy and sad. There were repeated whisperings about her friendliness with Craig Harding, but no one knew anything definite about her private affairs.

"When the door of her room was forced open, everything was in perfect order. Her travelling bags and her clothes were missing, but nothing else had been disturbed."

Uncle Hiram paused a moment before beginning the next part of the story.

"Hiram Brown, it's already five minutes past nine o'clock," announced Aunt Polly. "We've all had a long day, and besides, it's five minutes past our bedtime."

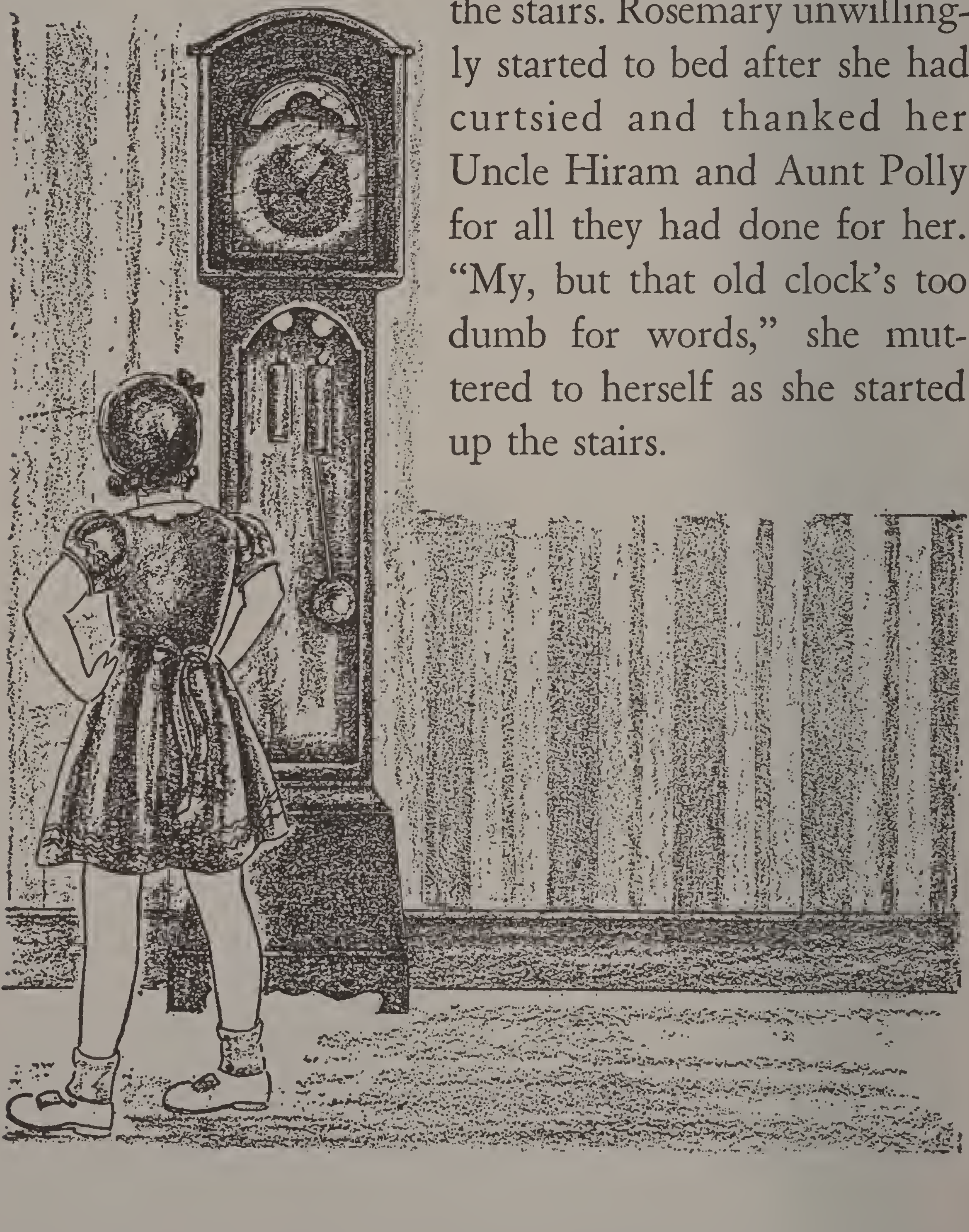
"But Aunt Polly," Rosemary pleaded, "the story is entirely too exciting to stop now. I won't sleep a wink, Uncle Hiram, if you don't finish."

"But you won't sleep a wink, no matter where I stop in this story, as I told you before I started it," Uncle Hiram smiled dryly as he lifted himself out of his chair. "That's the Brown of it!"

"Well, I suppose that's that!" Rosemary answered in disappointment.

While Uncle Hiram was winding the clock, whose face seemed serious and whose long brass pendulum dull, he called over his shoulder, "Rosemary, you and Betty forget about the story till tomorrow evening and run off to bed now like good girls."

Betty rose from her chair slowly, as if she had been glued to it, and obediently said goodnight and started up the stairs. Rosemary unwillingly started to bed after she had curtsied and thanked her Uncle Hiram and Aunt Polly for all they had done for her. "My, but that old clock's too dumb for words," she muttered to herself as she started up the stairs.



8.

GHOSTS OR FAIRIES

As soon as Rosemary and Betty were in their room, Rosemary turned off the light and peered through the window at the Old Man of the Mountain.

A mellow silvery light from the full moon fell upon the face of the castle, bathing it in a mystic haze that immediately aroused Rosemary's imagination.

"Look, Betty," Rosemary whispered, "isn't he smiling more than usual tonight? His great eyes are softened and his long flat nose rounded out, and his wide slit lips seem to turn up at the corners. Even his cheeks look as if he'd been laughing, for they are aglow, and the shadows from the three turrets make his hat appear to sit even more rakishly than ever."

"I've watched his face thousands of times," Betty answered as she cuddled down on the floor beside Rosemary and looked out of the window. "I've become so used to it that it seems a natural part of the scenery to me now."

"How I wish I were a man and big like my Daddy-Doc, for then I'd climb Mystery Mountain in a hurry," Rosemary boasted excitedly.

"Well, if I were a whole army of men," Betty replied, "I'd march straight away in the opposite direction."

"It seems to me that I see something white moving around!" Rosemary whispered, gazing intently at the mountain. "You don't suppose they're ghosts? Oh, now they seem to be dancing like fairies!"

"They probably are ghosts, for there's likely to be everything around that place—bears in the woods beyond, and wolves, and everything wild. But please do come away from his window, Rosemary, or neither of us will be able to sleep a wink!"

"We can sleep any night, but a sight such as this comes but once in a lifetime. Look, Betty, there are a hundred sparkling nymphs dancing about, and they're so rhythmic and beautiful that I'd like to be one of them myself. Do you suppose the Old Man of the Mountain imprisons these spirits during the day and then gives them an hour or two of play in the moonlight?"

"I've often wondered about them, too," Betty admitted, "and once I wrote a little poem about them, and imagined each one a winking fairy firefly."

"Isn't it fascinating to sit here at the window and watch. It must be beautiful to dance about scarcely touching your feet to the ground, and it must be marvelous to float through the air with wings like a fairy!"

"I once wrote a little poem about that, too," Betty confided modestly.

"Really, the face of the Old Man of the Mountain doesn't seem nearly so cold and calculating as it did this afternoon. If he enjoys the dancing of the spirits in the moonlight, he must have some love for the beautiful."

"Funny, isn't it, but I've often thought of these same things," Betty spoke dreamily, trusting her secret for the first time.

"But look, Betty, do you see what I see?" Rosemary whispered eagerly. "I simply can't describe it, but they seem to be crowning a Queen of the May or something like that. They're moving around much faster."

"Oh, yes, it's what I once made the title of a poem, *The Fireflies' Ball.*"

They're too beautiful for words. I don't see how there can be anything on the mountain to make one afraid."

"We mustn't sit here all night, Rosemary," Betty whispered, rising and taking her cousin by the arm. "There are so many things to do tomorrow."

"You must be tired, Betty, I know, with all the excitement, but I can't think of leaving the window while the moon is so lovely. I have never seen anything in Chicago as beautiful as this. Don't you suppose the Old Man of the Mountain has some arrangement with Puck and Pan and the Queen of the Fairies to put on this show for him?"

"I'm sorry, Rosemary, but I'll fall asleep here if I don't climb into bed," Betty answered as she begun unbuttoning her dress. "Of course, it must seem very strange to you, seeing it for the first time."

As soon as Betty's head struck the pillow she was asleep. It had been a long eventful day, and she was worn out from nervous excitement as well as physical fatigue.

Rosemary continued to sit at the window. She let her imagination run riot as she feasted her eyes on the mysterious moonlit landscape. When the moon shifted in the sky, the spirits gradually disappeared and the great face again assumed a look of cold unconcern.

Rosemary had watched, fascinated, while the moon had cast a sidelong silvery glance at the spirits dancing along the observation towers which formed the Old Man's nose and mouth. As she looked at the sparkle of their moving forms, it seemed as if they changed their tempo to a slow stately measure. She tried to call Betty back to the window, but Betty was too soundly asleep to be awakened.

Slowly the moon again shifted, and gradually the dancing figures made their exit and disappeared. The massive face fell into dark shadows so that Rosemary could no longer distinguish the separate features. For a time longer she amused herself imagining how the Old Man's expression changed from minute to minute, until she fancied that he was fast asleep.

A sudden gust of cold night air finally sent Rosemary to bed. When she tried to relax and go to sleep, her imagination became more active than it had been at any time during the day.

"I wonder what happened to Craig Harding," she asked herself, and then lay awake most of the night trying to answer the mystery. "Do you suppose I actually saw ghosts? Or were they fairies dancing around the Old Man of the Mountain? Or did I merely see fireflies in the grass, and then fancy, as Daddy-Doc would say, that I saw spirits? No, Daddy-Doc, I surely saw something more than fireflies this time. They must have been spirits of some sort. But what do you suppose happened to Craig Harding?"

While her thoughts were thus running in circles, Rosemary was suddenly brought back to reality by Betty, who sat up in bed, and cried out in a harsh voice, "There he is! There he is! He's coming! Look out, I say!"

Rosemary grasped Betty's arm. "What is it?"

"Oh, is it you, Rosemary, and am I still in bed?" gasped Betty, as she awakened just long enough to realize that she was dreaming.

It was after three o'clock in the morning before Rosemary's imagination began to tire. Time after time she was on the verge of falling asleep, and then suddenly was awakened by the mysterious face of the Old Man of the Mountain. After much tumbling and tossing about, she drifted off to dreamland, saying to herself: "The spirits I saw tonight were so beautiful and so like lovely dancers that I'm sure they would harm no one. Tomorrow night, I think I shall fix some kind of ladder so that I can climb down from the window and scamper up the mountain to join in the dance myself."

And with the resolve that she would soon solve the mystery, Rosemary fell asleep.

Early the next morning, Betty got quietly out of bed and dressed herself without waking Rosemary. Just as she was leaving the room, Rosemary said quietly, "You can't guess, Betty, what I've decided to do tonight."

"Why, good morning, Rosemary," Betty smiled. "No, I haven't the least idea."

"Well, this is it. Tonight I'm going to climb the mountain as soon as the fairies begin to dance, and find out what became of Craig Harding."

"There can't be any connection between fairies and Craig Harding," Betty laughed outright. "You must still be dreaming."

"No, I'm not, Betty, and I'm going, so there!"

"And I'm sorry if we must have this all over again today. But you go back to sleep, while I help Mother with the morning work."

Betty was thinking, as she went down the stairs, that Rosemary would probably do something rash and foolish, and she felt utterly helpless to prevent its happening.

Her father greeted her, and then asked, "How are you this morning, Betty? You look rather pale and tired. I hope you weren't upset by the story last night."

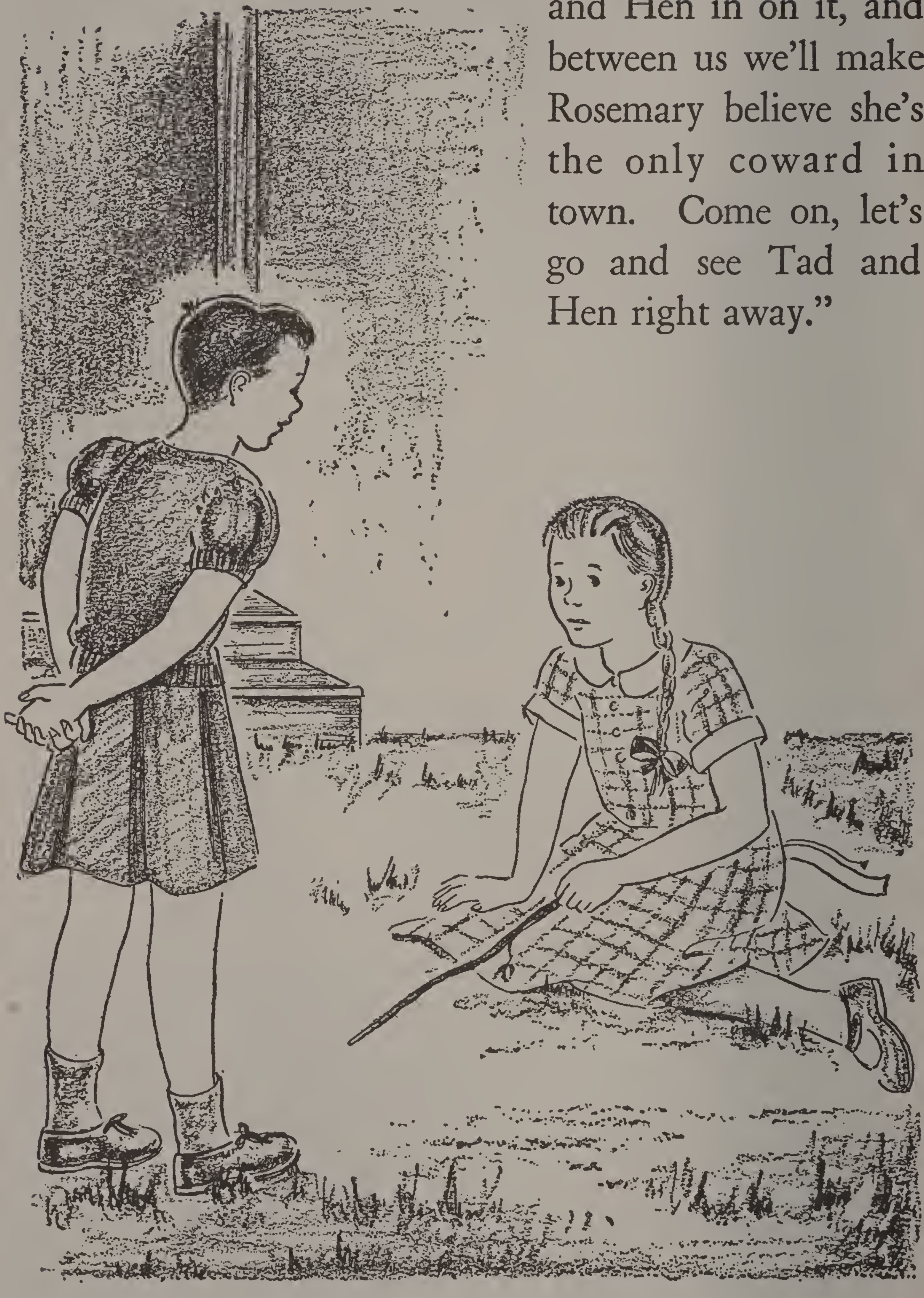
"No, I'm all right," Betty answered as she sat down at the table and nibbled at a piece of toast.

"But you aren't eating enough to keep a sparrow alive," her mother commented.

"I'm not hungry this morning, Mother," Betty insisted.

A few minutes later, when her father started to work, Betty walked with him to the end of the street. She had decided to tell her troubles to Tyne on the way home. Perhaps Tyne could help her find a way out.

When Tyne had heard Betty's story, she stood up straight and spoke confidently, "We'll cure your headstrong cousin, or know the reason why. We'll take Tad and Hen in on it, and between us we'll make Rosemary believe she's the only coward in town. Come on, let's go and see Tad and Hen right away."



9.

ROSEMARY GOES EXPLORING

It was after nine o'clock when Rosemary's eyes snapped wide open. She sat up in bed, looked around, and, for a minute couldn't imagine where she was. Then suddenly she remembered everything. Jumping quickly out of bed, she ran to the window to see if the Old Man of the Mountain was still where she had left him.

"Don't be surprised if I come up to visit you before the day is over," she began excitedly, "and you needn't think I shall be frightened, even if you do look cold and forbidding."

Rosemary opened her wardrobe trunk, put on hiking clothes, and hurried downstairs, hoping she had not inconvenienced Aunt Polly by getting up late. "I hope I haven't kept you waiting breakfast, Aunty," she apologized as she reached the kitchen.

"Goodness, no, child," Aunt Polly burst out laughing as she finished rolling the crust for a cherry pie. "You see, the world moves along in about the same groove day after day in this house." Then she added with dry humor, "The trouble with you, Rosemary, is that you're up too late for breakfast and a bit too early for lunch."

"But I'm not at all hungry," Rosemary smiled in reply.

"I'm only teasing you, Rosemary. Every healthy girl wants nourishment in the morning."

While Rosemary ate her fruit and toast and drank her milk, she made conversation. "What a pretty place you have here, Aunt Polly. Last night the moonlight through the window was perfectly beautiful."

"The fireflies are in season now, and they do add a little to the landscape."

"It wasn't just the fireflies, but something a hundred times more mysterious. Really, there's nothing at all in Chicago to compare with what I saw last night."

"It's good to hear you say that, for I've noticed that most people from the city seem to think that even Nature is found only in big towns, when, as a matter of fact, Nature loves small towns and country places most of all."

At this moment Rosemary remembered her cousin. "Where is Betty?"

"She's gone to Tyne's house, the third house on this side of the street not counting ours. You'll know it by the clump of mountain ash bushes in the front yard."

"Thank you, Aunt Polly, I think I'll see if I can find her," Rosemary said as she skipped out the door.

As she walked through the yard, Rosemary heard voices and stopped a minute to listen. It sounded as if Tad and Hen and Tyne were in some sort of argument. At first she thought of joining them, and then she had a better idea:

"This will probably be the best chance I'll ever have to visit the Old Man of the Mountain," she said to herself. "At least I'll go as far as the lookout where Betty and I were yesterday. Surely there can't be any harm in going there alone."

Rosemary walked on cat's feet until she was certain that no one could hear her, and then she hurried along the path, clambering over boulders and through deep tangles of grass and across steep gullies.

In a few minutes, she was so excited with her adventure that she thought of going all the way to the Old Man of the Mountain. After a half hour's climb, she was out of breath, and sat down on a pine stump to rest. For fear that someone might see her, she slid down between two large boulders, which entirely concealed her. After resting a few minutes she began climbing again, up and up, through jack pine thickets and past prickly briars and Canadian thistles and over masses of jagged rock. The climb itself was such fun that she thought little about where she was actually going. Her cheeks were rosy as two red apples, and she was wet with perspiration.

After another half hour of the hardest kind of going, Rosemary finally came to the sagging steel picket fence that she had been warned never to cross. As soon as she realized where she was, she knelt down behind a large jagged granite boulder and cautiously peered to one side and then to the other. Her heart was thumping as loud as a bass drum. Surely the Old Man of the Mountain would hear it.

The enormous face was peering down from almost directly overhead, and was so near that Rosemary could not distinguish the separate features. The huge eyes were hidden by two towering Lombardy poplars. What she saw was a great wooden building brown with decay, with no signs of life about it. When a deep shadow settled over the place as a threatening rain cloud passed overhead, a spooky feeling clutched at her heart.

For a moment nervousness almost overcame her, and she felt like running down the mountainside. Then she thought of her Daddy-Doc, and her courage returned. "If he were here, he'd say, 'Stick it out, that's the girl! A Brown never runs, you know!' "

This thought lessened her nervousness, and she began to make careful observations. The longer she looked about her, the less she saw to frighten her. The leaves on the poplars rustled, as if in terror, whenever a gust of wind passed, but the girl soon became accustomed to this sound. A red squirrel raced here and there through the trees and seemed to be running away from something mysterious, but Rosemary decided that this was merely his natural friskiness.

After what seemed an hour, Rosemary crept on hands and knees until she found two pickets bent apart as if someone had already opened a passageway. "This hole will do very nicely," she whispered to herself.

Before creeping through the hole, however, she looked here and there and everywhere until she had convinced herself that no one was around the place. Suddenly a granite monument, barely visible through the tangled grass, caught her eye. "Why, of course," thought Rosemary. "This is the one that Uncle Hiram described. I must find out if the inscription can still be read. Let's see; it should go something like this: 'The carpenters made the hotel. God created the lake and the jagged mountain.' "

With this thought uppermost in her mind, Rosemary crept stealthily through the fence, too excited now even to hear her heart, which was pounding like a triphammer. She was intensely alert, and ready to escape through the picket fence at the least sign of danger.

Suddenly, without any warning, there came such a wild clatter that it fairly froze her blood. In a frantic effort to get to her feet and run, she stumbled and fell headlong in the deep tangled grass.

After what seemed an eternity to the trembling girl, the noise stopped as suddenly as it had begun, and she got to her feet. For two or three minutes Rosemary was in a complete panic, wondering if she would ever find the strength to creep back to the waiting hole in the fence. Then, before she could summon the courage to try, the sound began again. This time it seemed less terrifying and when, later, it began a third time, she raised her head and looked about her. What she saw was an impertinent red squirrel, with his tail cocked above his head, chattering as if he had gone crazy.

Rosemary sank limply to the ground, giggling at the foolishness of her fright. "If my Daddy-Doc were here, he would surely think me a stupid, stupid child."

When her strength returned, she crept cautiously to the monument, and discovered that something had happened to it very recently. A bolt of lightning had torn a hole in one side of the cement foundation so that the bronze inscription had toppled over on its face and lay almost hidden in the grass. While examining the stone, Rosemary saw through the opening hewn in the bottom of the rock a strange copper box. To the imaginative girl it seemed to say, "Why don't you pull me out of this dark hole? I'm tired of lying here so many years."

Almost as if to oblige the box, Rosemary grasped it, and strangely enough, it came tumbling out without the least resistance. As she examined it, she was certain that it contained papers that would prove very, very important in solving the mystery of the Old Man of the Mountain.

A new thrill of excitement swept over her as she sat in the grass clutching the box. Suddenly a large piece of paper fluttered down to the ground directly in front of her. Without the least idea where it had come from, Rosemary reached out curiously and grasped it. Sure enough, it was real paper with real writing on it. Afraid that someone might see it, she folded it and quickly thrust it into her blouse pocket.

Rosemary now lost no time in creeping back to the opening in the steel picket fence. On the way back, she again heard a terrifying sound. It seemed to be the plaintive voice of a girl, but where it came from or what it said, she was too frightened to understand. All she knew was that it seemed to come down directly from the sky.

By exerting all her will power, Rosemary managed to reach the picket fence. When she was safely behind the protruding rock, she lay on the ground, nervously clutching the mysterious box in one hand and the mysterious paper in her pocket with the other. Sheer fright had taken all her strength, and each time she tried to get to her feet, her knees crumpled under her. How long she waited she never knew, but after what seemed years, she was able to start slowly down the mountain.

As her strength gradually returned, Rosemary walked faster, holding the precious box tightly under her arm and making sure that the piece of paper in her pocket did not mysteriously hop out and disappear.

When sheer fatigue forced her to sit down and rest, she began to examine the box. Its top was covered with a strange engraving which, when held at one angle, looked like a castle, and at another angle, like a human face. After puzzling over this for a time, she discovered that it was a likeness of the Old Man of the Mountain. Rosemary was now very sure that the box contained precious papers.

She tried to open it, but the lid was locked securely from the inside. When she shook the box, the papers inside shifted from end to end. They undoubtedly contained information that would help to solve the mystery.

A surge of pride came over her as she thought of what her Daddy-Doc would say when all the facts were disclosed. Happily and with renewed courage, she hastened down the mountainside at a faster pace.

10.

UNDER THE MULLEN STALK

As Rosemary hurried down the mountain, she kept wondering what to do with the mysterious copper box. She had not the strength to open it, although she felt sure that its contents were of great importance.

"If only my Daddy-Doc were here," she said to herself, "we'd solve the mystery in no time. Then Craig Harding wouldn't be so misunderstood and the Old Man wouldn't seem such a terrifying mystery."

While crossing a narrow gully between two pointed rocks, she heard the indistinct hum of voices. She crouched behind a granite boulder to listen, and immediately recognized Tyne's booming voice.

"Yes, Betty's cousin Rosemary will wish she was back where she came from by the time we're through with her."

"You said something this time," Hen laughed. "When she meets this outfit and hears the bellow we'll make and sees our terrible faces, she won't stop running till she hits old Chicago on the hop."

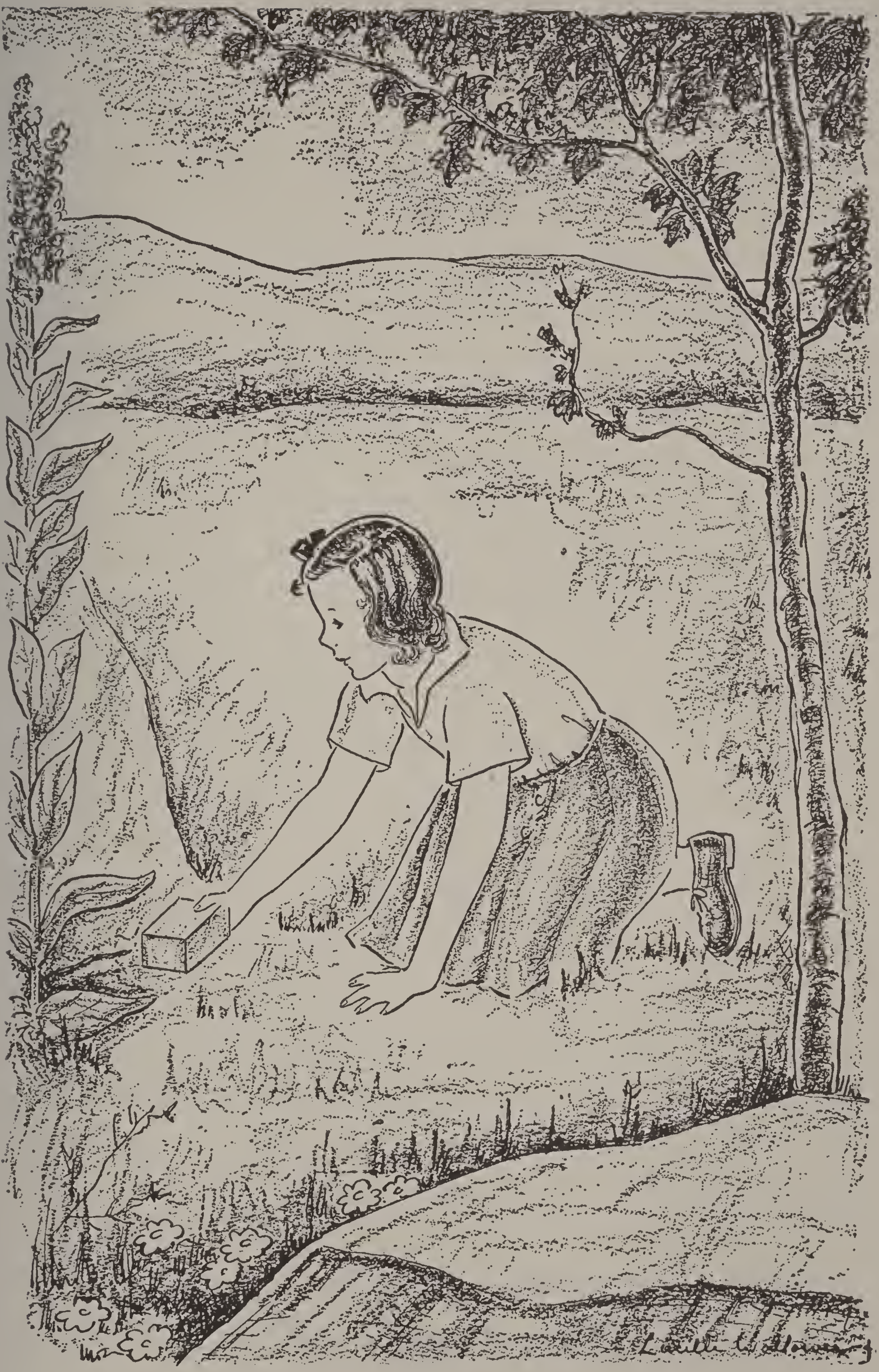
This brought more laughter, and Rosemary's cheeks burned and her throat went dry as she realized that Tyne and Tad and Hen were planning to play a trick on her.

"She's long overdue," Tyne added. "Silence! I think I hear her coming."

This plot, without Rosemary's knowing anything about it, had been hatched earlier in the morning when Betty went to Tyne for help in preventing Rosemary from rashly going to the top of Mystery Mountain. Betty was to wait till Rosemary had finished her breakfast and was then to encourage the venturesome girl to climb up the rocks toward the Old Man of the Mountain. When Tyne and Tad and Hen saw her coming, they were to pretend that they were jibbering ghosts.

Rosemary listened until she had overheard all the details of the plan. Then she decided to advance upon them when they least expected it and give them a surprise. Suddenly remembering the precious copper box, she realized that she must not allow anyone to know that she had found it. If she did, the secret would be out. She looked quickly in every direction for a place to hide the box, and the best place she could find was a crevice beneath an irregular granite rock that was overspread by a great mullen stalk.

Into this opening Rosemary thrust the box and cov-



Into this opening Rosemary thrust the box

ered it with small pieces of rock and dead leaves. Then she walked silently forward and around to the opposite side of a shoulder of rock where Tyne and Tad and Hen were rehearsing their parts. In an attempt to disguise themselves completely, they had put on costumes which Tyne and Tad had found in their attics.

Rosemary came upon them quite without warning, although Tad had been stationed on a shelving rock as a lookout. Pretending innocence of all that she had overheard, Rosemary called out laughingly, "Is this some new kind of Hallowe'en game? And won't you let me join in your frolic?"

Tad climbed down from his seat, looking somewhat foolish, and Hen grabbed his false face that resembled a skeleton, while Tyne pulled down her dunce cap and her witch's face, and wrapped her Japanese printed kimono tighter about her. Rosemary burst out laughing at their confusion. Finally Tad pulled off his monstrous Santa Claus hat and whiskers and smiled grimly.

Snooks was the only one who acted at all natural. He pounded the ground with his clumsy tail and showed his shiny teeth in a pained effort to smile in order to show that as far as he was concerned, Rosemary was welcome.

"Come now, don't let me spoil your game," Rosemary went on. "I'll do whatever you're doing."

"You're just too late," Hen scowled as he stripped off his horrible skeleton makeup. "If you want to know, we were planning to give you a real scare, but you've spoiled all our fun."

"I told Tyne it wouldn't work," Tad added in disgust, "but she would have her way."

"But I don't quite understand," Rosemary said, in the hope that they would tell her the truth.

"Well, you see it was this way," Tyne explained. "Betty said that you were planning to make a trip to the top of Mystery Mountain, and she thought, for your own good, that we should stop you from doing anything so rash."

"That's the truth," Tad continued. "We all thought you might get yourself into serious trouble."

"But you're on your way up to visit the Old Man of the Mountain now, I suppose," Hen smiled dryly.

"No, indeed," Rosemary answered, "I'm on my way back to Aunt Polly's, for I've already made my visit."

"You didn't!" Tad asserted.

"And that explains why we didn't see you coming; we were looking in the wrong direction," Hen grinned.

"What did you see at the top of the mountain?" Tad asked, trying to hide the interest he felt.

"For the present I'm keeping that quite to myself," Rosemary replied, "and if you want to know what's there today, you'll have to go and see for yourself."

"Maybe there's a good reason why you're not telling," Tyne suggested. "Just how can you prove that you've been there?"

"I'm not trying to prove it," Rosemary laughed, "I'm merely telling you."

"Her shoes and the cockleburrs on her clothes show that she's been somewhere," Tad commented, "and the grass seed in her hair."

"There's no doubt about it," Rosemary answered.

"But you said a minute ago that you wanted to join us in our play," Tad continued, changing the subject. "We've been planning to put on a home-made circus next week. Would you like to help us with this?"

"I think it would be great fun if you'll let me be your solo dancer."

"How are you going to prove that you can dance?" asked Tyne impertinently.

"You're always wanting proof," Rosemary laughed, "and this time I'll try to give it."

Before the children quite realized what she was doing, Rosemary had climbed to the top of the smooth rock where Tad had been stationed and did a bit of lively aesthetic dancing.

Tad and Hen were fascinated, wondering how she could bend and sway so gracefully, while Tyne felt large and clumsy, as she unconsciously moved her body awkwardly in time with the rhythm.

The next minute Rosemary leapt down from the rock and asked about Betty.

"She's probably still hunting for you," Tyne explained, "She went down to find you two hours ago, and hasn't come back."

"Then I must find her; I hope she isn't worried about me," Rosemary called as she hurried away. "And I'm sorry if I've spoiled your fun. Very likely I would have been frightened if you had seen me first."

"There's no doubt about it," shouted Tyne.

As she hurried toward Aunt Polly's house, Rosemary kept a sharp watch for landmarks so that she would know exactly where to find the precious copper box when she wanted it. "Here are three trees in a row," she said in a conscious effort to remember, "one is a gnarled and bent evergreen, and another is as straight and gaunt as a church steeple, and the third has a hump on his back like a camel. I'm sure I won't forget these. Yes, and here is a funny boulder that looks shiny and jagged like a giant's tooth. Who knows but the Old Man of the Mountain sneezed this out some dark night when no one was looking."

As Rosemary walked farther and farther, her heart began to sink for fear that she might not be able to find the box when she later needed it. There were so many crooked and straight and humped trees on all sides that already she was becoming bewildered. She tried all the harder to fix firmly in her mind the three trees in a row and the jagged tooth of rock.

When Rosemary finally reached Aunt Polly's, the screen door was latched and the kitchen was empty. As she sat down on the back steps to think, she noticed that she was trembling like a leaf. And it was no wonder, for this was the first time that she had ever experienced a real first-hand adventure. In this one crowded morning she had actually lived an adventure that had been beyond her wildest dreams. A little smile played across her face as she reviewed the tense moments when she had lain crouched in the grass, terrified by the chattering red squirrel.

Gradually becoming conscious of something burning, Rosemary looked in at the screen door and saw smoke escaping from the oven. She ran around to the front of the house where, luckily, the door was unlocked. In less than a minute she had reached the kitchen and opened the oven. Aunt Polly's cherry pie was burned to a crisp charcoal, and Rosemary was nearly suffocated by the cloud of sooty smoke.

"This is all very queer," Rosemary thought. "I wonder what has happened to Aunt Polly and Betty. I guess children aren't the only ones who run away from their work and forget their cooking."

She ran upstairs and called, but the house was empty. She then ran outside and looked searchingly up and down the street. Two blocks away there was a large crowd of women and children gathered in a neighbor's yard.

Rosemary could see that Aunt Polly was the center of interest, and that she was talking eagerly and gesturing with her hands. And as Rosemary came near she could hear the words, but didn't understand who her Aunt Polly was talking about.

"The child is lost, that's evident. Yes, as I said, she went out to find Betty, and that's the last anybody's seen of her. She must have evaporated or gone up in thin smoke, or something."

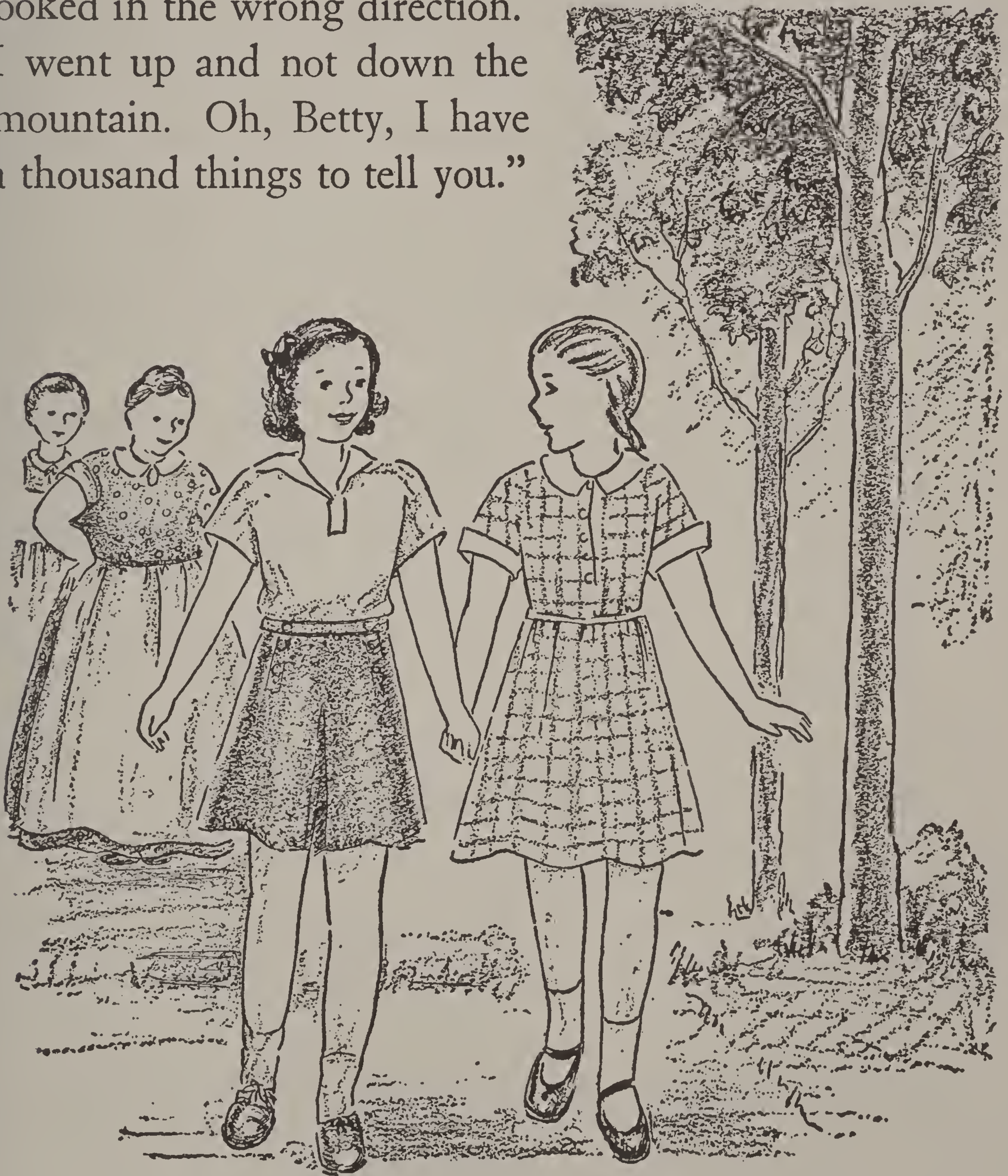
Just then Rosemary burst into the crowd, calling, "Aunt Polly, come home in a hurry! Your cherry pie is burned to a crisp, and the house is full of smoke!"

Aunt Polly turned and stared blankly, like a woman in a dream. Her face went pale, and for a minute she was entirely speechless, and then a broad smile overspread her face. "Well, if my cherry pie's burned to a crisp, why all the hurry!"

The women were still laughing as Betty took Rosemary by the arm and started back to the house.

"Where in the world have you been all this while?" Betty asked with great concern. "We've searched everywhere for you. I've even been down to the dock to see if you were there."

"The trouble was," Rosemary smiled, "that you looked in the wrong direction. I went up and not down the mountain. Oh, Betty, I have a thousand things to tell you."



11.

GIFTS FOR BETTY

By the time Aunt Polly reached the kitchen she was quite out of breath and her face was flushed, but before she could fully recover her speech she removed what was left of the pie from the oven, and then sat down to rest.

Rosemary immediately began to explain, “It was like this, Aunt Polly—but first I want you to know that I'm very sorry, for it never occurred to me that you would think I was lost, and worry.”

“I suppose it is silly,” Aunt Polly smiled, “for anybody to be scared about your being lost, when you can find your way everywhere alone in Chicago, but you can't exactly blame me for thinking about your safety while you are visiting here.”

“I was just so curious that I couldn't endure it a minute longer,” went on Rosemary. “I wanted to see if the monument Uncle Hiram told us about last night was still there; you know the one that Craig Harding set up with the bronze inscription about carpenters building the castle and God making the mountain and the lake. And so I did the only thing possible under the circumstances, especially since no one would tell me: I went up alone and made a personal investigation."

"My stars, child," Aunt Polly exclaimed, "you didn't visit the Old Man of the Mountain alone!"

Betty, who had been cleaning the kitchen as she listened, looked up in surprise, and showed by her expression that she, too, was greatly excited.

"But there's nothing at all to be nervous about, Aunt Polly," Rosemary continued, "for everything was as quiet as death except for the leaves on the poplar trees and an impudent chattering red squirrel. And sure enough the monument was there, only it had toppled over. It looked as if a bolt of lightning had only just split open the cement base."

"Personal investigation! My sakes alive, that's the Brown of it!" Aunt Polly laughed. "When your father was a boy around this town, he was always investigating something or other and keeping his family in hot water until they were about crazy most of the time."

"But wouldn't you rather that I go and see for myself than die of curiosity?"

"I'd very much rather you'd pay some attention to your own personal safety."

"But when I tell Daddy-Doc how I went when everybody else was afraid of the place, he'll surely be proud of me."

"You have yet to learn the difference between being brave and foolhardy," Aunt Polly cautioned, "and you had better let me know before you set out on another such wild goose chase."

"I didn't mean any harm, Aunt Polly, and I didn't decide to go until after I started to find Betty; truly, I didn't."

"Well, don't let it happen again, for cherry pies don't exactly grow on every bush, and besides I don't want to be scared out of a year's growth every day."

"I'm very sorry I was the cause of your worry, and I'll be more careful next time," promised Rosemary.

"Well, then, we won't worry any more about it and, as your Uncle Hiram says, we'll just write it off the record and forget it."

With this weighty matter settled, Aunt Polly's thoughts naturally turned to the noonday meal. In a spirit of playful banter she announced, "Well, Rosemary and Betty, I think we'll have precious little for dinner, as far as I can see, with the pie burned up and the morning worse than wasted."

Rosemary entirely missed her aunt's humor and interrupted her quickly. "Oh, I'm so glad, for now I can invite you and Betty down to the hotel for dinner. Daddy-Doc gave me extra money for just this sort of thing, and he told me I must be sure to take you out somewhere very often, either to the movies or to dinner, but I seem to be forgetting almost everything he told me. This is the first time it's popped into my head."

Rosemary was so delightfully truthful and sweet and serious about everything that her Aunt Polly loved her.

"But Rosemary," Aunt Polly replied, "I was only fooling. Why, I wouldn't tramp up and down this mountain again today for forty hotel dinners. I have to be careful about my rheumatism now and then."

"We can call a taxi," Rosemary insisted.

"Taxi, nonsense! Didn't I tell you yesterday I wouldn't trust myself to ride up and down this mountain in such a crazy contraption? And if we don't have something for dinner, it will be the first time in twenty years. One cherry pie more or less won't quite put us out of house and home." As Aunt Polly talked, she began to prepare the meal.

While Aunt Polly bustled about the kitchen, the girls went upstairs to Betty's room. On the way, Betty whispered to Rosemary, "How did it all happen, and what did you see?"

"When I finished breakfast," Rosemary explained, "I started out to find you, and I heard you and Tyne and

Tad and Hen talking rather loudly about something. Then suddenly the thought came to me that this was my chance to visit the Old Man, and so I went. On the way back, I overheard Tyne and Tad and Hen planning to frighten me; but I was on my way down the mountain instead of up, and this gave them the surprise of their lives. After a while we laughed and made it all up, and now we're good friends, and what's more, we're all going to put on a big home-made circus next week in Tad's and Hen's barn."

"We really weren't as silly as we seem," Betty interrupted, "for we were only trying to protect you. But if you have really, truly been to see the Old Man of the Mountain and are still alive to tell the story, I guess there's not much to worry about."

Suddenly Rosemary remembered the piece of paper that had fluttered down out of the air. She looked closely at Betty and asked in a whisper, "Betty, can you keep a very great secret, one of the biggest secrets in the world?"

"Why, sure I can."

"And will you promise, cross your heart, never to tell a single person in the world?"

"I will," Betty answered simply, making the necessary gesture.

"This paper in my hand flew down from the sky when I was at the top of Mystery Mountain. I'm sure it came from a girl about our age, for I heard her voice but couldn't see her."

Rosemary scanned the page, noting the cramped but delicate handwriting. "Here's what it says:

> I am Claribel Lee. I am imprisoned in a great castle on the top of a high mountain. The castle is kept by an old withered man and woman, who guard Claribel so that she cannot possibly escape. Claribel is writing this note and throwing it out through the topmost window in hopes someone will find it and come to her rescue."

Betty's face filled with pity and wonder and fear. "Mighty lucky for you that the old man and woman didn't happen to see you, or you would now be held with Claribel in the high tower."

"The only thing that worries me is how we are to rescue Claribel."

"We won't ever try to rescue her ourselves. We'll ask Dad what to do when he comes home this evening."

"We'll try it first ourselves," insisted Rosemary. "Oh, I know! Why couldn't we fly a message, together with a piece of rope for a ladder, up to Claribel? Do you know where we can get a kite?"

"Tad and Hen have a kite, if that's all we need."

"That's fine. We'll attend to this just as soon as we possibly can. Remember, Betty, mum's the word!"

"Very well, I'll remember."

"And now we can think of the circus for a minute," Rosemary continued. "I'll show you the first part of my solo dance."

Rosemary danced with such abandon that her body seemed as flexible as a fresh young branch. Betty watched her, captivated by the grace and beauty of every movement.

"Why, you're a poem in yourself, Rosemary," Betty beamed.

When Rosemary sat down, breathless, her eyes fell upon her trunk, and there popped into her head another thing that she had completely forgotten. She excitedly opened the trunk, removed the rod, drew out the lower drawer, and uncovered a large soft bundle tied with fancy red ribbon and another smaller package, done up in a flowered green wrapper.

"Do forgive me, Betty, for forgetting about these. My Daddy-Doc sent them with his best compliments; but so many things have been happening, one right after another, that I simply forgot all about these gifts."

With eyes as big as saucers, Betty began opening the packages with nervous fingers. When the first was untied, there lay before her a lustrous figured old rose silk dress with lovely lace trimming. In addition, there were silk hose and dainty lingerie. In the other package she found hiking boots and shining patent leather pumps.

Then Rosemary remembered the third bundle, which contained a stunning hat.

Overcome with surprise, Betty sat down on the bed beside the lovely things and stared at them, while she ran her fingertips lightly over the silk. What an exquisite sensation it was to examine the perfectly blended colors and to be conscious of the delicate perfume that pervaded everything. After a minute, Betty came back to reality, threw her arms excitedly around Rosemary, and kissed her.

"They're all so wonderful," Betty exclaimed when she could find her voice, "but I never expected I'd have anything half so beautiful for my very own."

"The next thing," Rosemary suggested, "is to see how you look in them. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, you know."

At first Betty objected. They were so beautiful that she feared she might spoil them. "We'll wait till my dad gets home this evening; he'll want to see them, too."

"There's no law against your putting them on twice, is there?" Rosemary insisted. "Here, I'll help you. Simply kick out of your clothes this very minute."

A few moments later Betty looked at herself in the mirror and could scarcely believe her eyes; she seemed to have undergone as marvelous a change as Cinderella at the hands of her fairy godmother.

It was not merely the clothes that worked the miracle. Rosemary had unbraided Betty's hair and had fluffed it loosely about her forehead and over her ears.

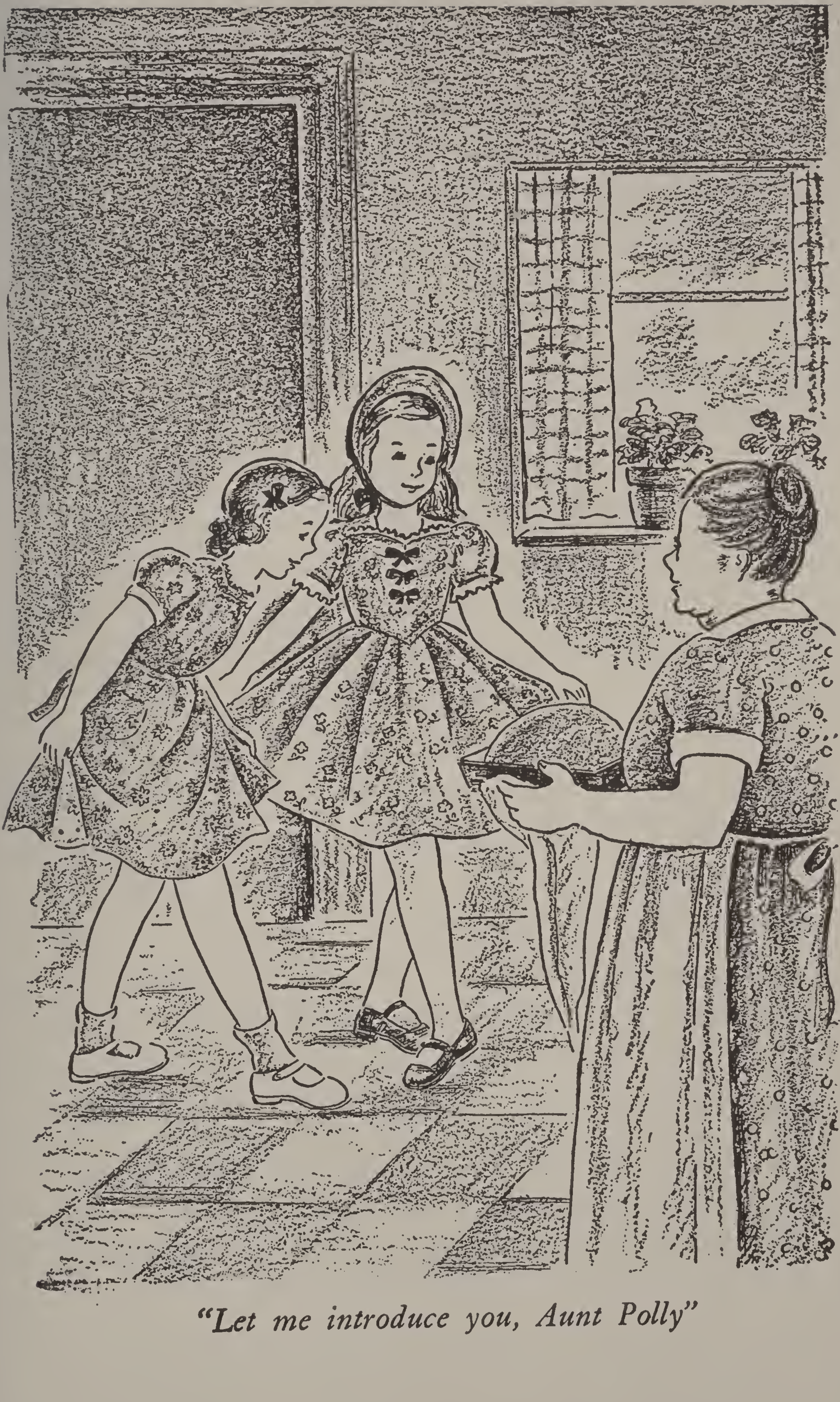
"Now if you had your hair bobbed, Betty, you would be perfect," Rosemary complimented as she stood back and studied her cousin.

"But my father wants me to look as his sister Miriam used to look when she was a girl my age," Betty explained, "and I don't think he'll like me any other way."

"Why doesn't he wear a full beard then, the same as Grandfather Brown used to wear at his age?" Rosemary replied, quite out of patience. "According to the old photograph down in the living room, he surely did have a full crop of alfalfa! Just wait till I talk to your father. Now it's time for us to go down and introduce you to your mother. She'll do well to recognize her own daughter."

Down the stairs Betty walked with a stately grace, feeling that she was treading an airy pathway strewn with roses. When Aunt Polly looked up and saw her, she almost dropped the hot loaf of bread she was just taking from the oven.

"Let me introduce you, Aunt Polly, to Miss Betty Brown," Rosemary began in mock seriousness as she dropped a low curtsy. "This is your very own daughter dressed in her very own clothes."



"Let me introduce you, Aunt Polly"

"My goodness gracious, Betty!" Aunt Polly began, the pan of hot bread still in her hands.

"These are Betty's clothes, as I told you," Rosemary continued, while her Aunt Polly tried to control her surprise and pride. "And when Betty has her hair bobbed, even you won't know her without taking a second look. Betty's the prettiest girl in all Marquette."

"But why don't you say something, Mother?" Betty asked, turning slowly around in a glow of pride. "Wasn't Uncle Will wonderful to send me such a beautiful outfit?" As she spoke, her fingertips played lightly up and down the silken fabric.

"Well, bless my heart," Aunt Polly finally smiled, "and won't your father be proud of you, too. But it hardly seems possible that it's you, Betty. Have you thanked Rosemary? You must get your pen and paper right away, and write your Uncle Will a fine letter and thank him for everything."

"I'll wear this dress only three times a year," Betty planned, "once on my birthday, and again on Easter Sunday, and then on Christmas. I'm going to make it last a long, long time."

"You'll have to wear a brick on your head to keep yourself from outgrowing the dress, then," Aunt Polly laughed. "But don't be so afraid of wearing it, for I'll bet that when your father sees how fine you look, he'll be so proud of you that he'll get you another outfit just as nice before this one is outgrown. You girls had better clear out now while I get the things on the table. And Betty, you take these new clothes off before you eat dinner, and then you can put them on again when your father comes home. My, but won't you give Hiram the surprise of his life!"

When the girls were back in Betty's room, Betty again looked at herself in the mirror, and for the first time in her life she felt a sense of personal vanity. Turning this way and that, she studied herself from every angle, and what she saw didn't seem at all real.

"Now you know, Betty," said Rosemary, "what it feels like to be dressed up to the minute. But you had better slip out of these clothes, for we won't have any hot bread if you don't, and hot bread is very important after a strenuous morning."

Just then Aunt Polly's cheery voice came booming up the stairs, "Dinner is ready!"

Everything tasted alike to Betty, and the hot bread and the fresh honey went unnoticed, for she felt that she had stepped out of the world of the commonplace and into a paradise of dreams.

12.

THE CLOCK STRIKES NINE

Uncle Hiram was indeed excited when he saw Betty, and exclaimed with admiration, "But you don't mean to say they're your very own, Betty. Turn around slowly so that I can see every side of you. Why, you're the finest looking girl I've ever laid eyes on, and you're too sweet not to be kissed! Now you'll have to write your Uncle Will a long letter and tell him how happy you are. Upon my word, I can't take my eyes off you!"

"You don't know how happy I am, Dad," Betty beamed, almost beside herself with joy.

Soon they were seated at the supper table, and Rosemary could scarcely wait until Uncle Hiram had washed down the last bite of apple pie with his last cup of black coffee. As soon as he had pushed his chair back, smiling contentedly, she began.

"You must keep your promise to go on with the story of the Old Man of the Mountain, Uncle Hiram, for I can't wait another minute to know all that happened."

"I thought you'd had about enough of that particular story," Uncle Hiram drawled slowly. "Your Aunt Poll says you ran off this morning without telling a soul, to make a personal investigation of the bronze inscription on the monument. And when she couldn't locate you anywhere, she got out the whole neighborhood and told everybody that you were lost or maybe kidnapped. She even sent Betty down to the dock and sent word up where I was working, and kept me in hot water most of the day."

"I'm terribly sorry, Uncle Hiram, that I made so much trouble for you and Aunt Polly and Betty, but now my hunt for the monument is past history and can never happen again. Besides, nobody is going to worry about me again, for they've discovered that I'm a hundred-per cent Brown, which means that I can take care of myself. Anyway, I've promised to tell Aunt Polly before I go on any more wild goose chases, as she calls them."

"That may all be true enough," Uncle Hiram admitted, "but I figure that you're likely to make another tour of investigation to find out for yourself if what I tell you is true. And you know, Rosemary, the Old Man's not the kind of person that a girl of your age should visit alone, even if you are a Brown!" Uncle Hiram added with conviction.

"If I promise you that I won't ever go alone again, will that make any difference?" Rosemary asked earnestly.

"So far as I know, a mere promise never yet stopped a Brown when his deepest feelings were stirred. What you need, Rosemary, is somebody to add a half bushel of common sense to your constitution, so you won't do anything so rash again." Uncle Hiram smiled dryly as he got up from the table and walked slowly into the parlor and took his place in his comfortable rocker. Rosemary followed closely after him, still begging for the story:

"Well, then, you may as well go on."

"Do you think I had better, Poll?" Uncle Hiram called.

"No, I don't think you should, Hiram Brown, if you want my private opinion on the matter," Aunt Polly replied as she quickly finished the dishes and pans. Secretly she was just as anxious to hear the story as Rosemary, though she tried to conceal the fact. "But you know as well as I do that Rosemary is a Brown, and if you don't tell her everything, she'll likely as not run off again to make another investigation."

"I'm sure," Rosemary laughed, "that I don't want to be the cause of getting the entire neighborhood excited in another fruitless search. It will be much simpler all the way around, Uncle Hiram, if you tell me the whole story. If you don't, there is no telling what kind of wild caper my curiosity will lead me into next."

"You're such a thoroughbred Brown, Rosemary, and there's no doubt about it," Uncle Hiram smiled dryly, quite at his wits' end.

"That's just another reason why I should know, for being what I am, it will do me no harm to know everything."

By this time Aunt Polly had finished her dishes and now sat down opposite Uncle Hiram. She took up her knitting, and as the story proceeded, she punctuated each separate incident with an excited click of her flying needles. Uncle Hiram slouched down in his chair, crossed his legs, and twiddled his thumbs, trying to recall what he had said the previous evening. Rosemary and Betty sat side by side, tense with expectation.

"Let me see, where did I leave off?" he asked uncertainly.

"You left off abruptly at nine o'clock," Rosemary replied without wasting a second. "You didn't explain what happened after the disappearance of Harriet Fairfax and Craig Harding."

"I told you that the story of Craig Harding got into all the papers, didn't I?" Uncle Hiram asked pointedly.

"Yes, you told that much, but nothing more."

"Nobody knew exactly what had happened, you see," went on Uncle Hiram. "In the middle of the night a piercing voice had been heard pretty generally throughout the hotel. Nobody thought much about it at the time, for they simply took it for granted that somebody had either come home drunk or had had a nightmare.

"No two persons later agreed as to what had happened. A Mr. Espy, who was occupying the adjoining room, reported that he had heard, 'Spare me, Craig Harding! Spare me!' He rather thought it was a woman's voice, but he couldn't be sure. He also reported that there had been a struggle, and then a dull thud, thud, thud, that sounded like the crash of a cane against solid ivory.

"Mrs. Hendrickson and her daughter, who were in the room directly across the corridor, said that they had heard somebody shriek, but neither could remember any names, nor what was said.

"Others in the hotel heard snatches of conversation, but no two persons had heard the same words.

"The city police came out to the hotel at once and made what they called a thorough investigation. They looked around for some sort of evidence and listened to everything that anybody had to say. All the hired help talked freely, but each one had a different theory as to what had actually occurred.

"Right after this, an old codger who looked like a hayseed from Podunk engaged a room at the hotel and sat in the lobby every evening, chewing his goose-quill toothpick and encouraging everybody to talk. 'Yah, that sounds plausible,' he would comment whenever anyone explained his pet theory, 'but how do you account for this?' And when a person didn't talk freely, the old hayseed would ask with a childish grin, 'Wal, who do ye think wuz the guilty party?'

"After a while the police became suspicious of the old rube and arrested him on the theory that he might possibly be the guilty party himself, or else know who the guilty person was.

"A few days later it leaked out that the old rube, when he was taken down to the City Hall, jerked off his whiskers and wig and flashed papers which proved that he was a Pinkerton detective, sent up from Chicago to work on the case.

"From time to time, the Police Department was aware that there were as many as half a dozen detectives in town. Who was paying for this work the local police were never able to figure out.

"Some of these detectives infested the hotel as guests, and others impersonated travelling salesmen. They went about among the merchants, pretending to sell various wares; but always they were asking questions and getting people to talk about the mysterious disappearance of Craig Harding and Harriet Fairfax.

"The strange thing about the whole affair was that nobody ever knew anything for certain about what had happened. The only story that was ever proved was that a dapper young man and a stunning-looking blond came into town on the 5:25 evening train on the day of Craig Harding's disappearance. The couple had been seen by a number of people, loitering around the front veranda of the hotel during the evening, but nobody ever knew where they had come from nor where they went. So you see, this knowledge didn't help a bit in clearing up the mystery.

"It was only natural that things about the hotel should soon begin to fall into disorder. As soon as the boss cat disappeared, it was to be expected that the servant kittens would play when they should have been working.

"Nearly all the summer boarders stayed on, partly out of curiosity and partly for fear they would be under suspicion if they left town.

Things went on like this for exactly six weeks after the disappearance of Craig Harding. Then one night at midnight the guests were aroused by strange noises coming from the room of a Mrs. Grace Phillips. Everyone knew that this woman was of a very nervous disposition and that she had been greatly disturbed by all that had happened. When these noises continued, the guests gathered in the corridor, and finally called the police. The door of the woman's room was forced open, and Mrs. Phillips was found to be out of her mind. She was taken to the asylum at Newberry, and it was hoped that she would, in time, regain her sanity long enough to tell what had occurred. Rumors went around that someone had forced his way into her room and had escaped through the window. When Mrs. Phillips did regain her senses, however, her mind was a complete blank as to what had happened on that particular night.

"After this incident, things happened rapidly. The next night three different guests reported that they had seen two different ghosts.

"Old Captain Kennedy, who had lived all his life out-of-doors and who had been through every sort of adventure imaginable, said that he had seen, as plain as he ever saw anything in his life, a figure exactly like that of Craig Harding, and that this figure was accompanied by a woman in black. These two figures had stopped in front of the granite monument, looked at the bronze inscription for a full minute, and then had walked quickly away. Captain Kennedy wouldn't allow himself to be contradicted, but insisted he had a pair of eyes that he could trust absolutely."

Rosemary looked at Betty, remembering the copper box hidden beneath the mullen stalk on the lone mountainside. At that moment she made up her mind to lose no time in recovering it, for she was now more than sure that it contained important information.

"The next day," continued Uncle Hiram, unconscious that the clock was striking nine, "every summer boarder in the entire hotel cleared out as fast as if there had been an outbreak of the bubonic plague or smallpox.

"By evening, only the cook and the general business manager remained in the hotel. What happened to these two, nobody ever found out. Along about three o'clock the next morning they came racing down the mountainside in their pajamas, scared out of their wits. They didn't stop running till they met a policeman, but when they tried to tell what had happened, their accounts were so incoherent and contradictory that all anyone ever knew was that the hotel was surely haunted."

"Hiram," interrupted Aunt Polly, "we're as excited as children, and neither of us heard the clock strike!"

Uncle Hiram rose from his chair, a dreamy look still in his eyes, and Rosemary and Betty awakened as if from a nightmare.

"But this isn't the end of the story, is it?" Rosemary pleaded in a tense voice.

Uncle Hiram smiled vaguely, walked across the room, took the key from its peg on the wall, and began winding the clock.

"No, Rosemary," he said, "the story's hardly more than half done yet."

"But didn't anybody ever come to live at Mystery Mountain afterward?" Rosemary asked excitedly.

"Yes, on various occasions, but you'll have to wait till another time to hear about that," Uncle Hiram replied, secretly disappointed that he could not continue. "You already know enough to understand why everybody is sure that the place is inhabited by ghosts."

"Please, Uncle Hiram, can't you finish?" Rosemary begged.

"You two girls hop right off to bed now like good children," Aunt Polly interrupted firmly as she put away her knitting.

"Goodnight, and thank you, Uncle Hiram," Rosemary said, as she and Betty reluctantly started to bed.

"My, but you girls do look sweet tonight, especially Betty in her new dress," Uncle Hiram smiled proudly, "Goodnight."

"That clock always strikes at the wrong time," Rosemary grumbled as they reached the top of the stairs. "I don't understand why Uncle Hiram keeps the old thing going!"

13.

AN ESCAPE AT DAWN

It was now bedtime, but Rosemary was wider awake than ever. She looked out through the window at the moonlit face of the Old Man of the Mountain, where the fairies were again dancing their slow, rhythmic dance. They sparkled as if thousands of fireflies lighted their steps along the slope of the mountain.

Rosemary was worried about the copper box, wondering if it was still secure under the mullen stalk beneath the jagged granite rock. She must recover it as soon as possible, for undoubtedly it contained the clue to the Craig Harding mystery.

Betty was trying to decide what to do with her lovely new clothes, for she knew it would break her heart if anything happened to them. She pulled out the bottom drawer of her oak bureau and relined it with fresh paper. Then she folded each garment, carefully smoothing out each wrinkle before putting it away. When she had finished, she looked around to see what had happened to Rosemary, and sure enough, there she sat gazing intently out the window.

"Aren't you ever coming to bed?" Betty asked a minute later as she stood in her pajamas ready to jump under the covers.

"Yes, but please don't hurry me," Rosemary replied in a tone which indicated that she was making an important decision.

A few minutes later Rosemary came away from the window and began slowly to get ready for bed. She put on her pajamas, turned out the light, and hopped in beside Betty.

Betty was already asleep, dreaming that she was in a land where every child was dressed in silk and had wings, and that she herself was the Queen of Fairyland.

Rosemary lay wide awake, wondering how she could get out of the house without disturbing the entire family. She thought of every possible method of escape. She had read of people who knotted the bedclothes into a rope, down which they slid to freedom, and she had seen in the movies how others had jumped boldly out of windows, trusting to a kind providence that their bones would not be broken. There were still others who had climbed down trellis walls and rainpipes. There were a hundred different ways, but she couldn't decide which to choose. She couldn't think of using the bedclothes, for that wouldn't be fair to Betty. She couldn't leap out of the upstairs window, for she would have to land on flinty granite rock. It would be quite impossible to climb down the trellis, because there wasn't any trellis!

The only practicable way was to open the door which led to the front veranda and then to climb out over the railing and slide down the porch post to the ground. When she had finally settled everything to her own satisfaction, Rosemary mumbled to herself as she tried to sleep, "I'll get up and go find the copper box as soon as the first streaks of dawn appear."

With this momentous decision, Rosemary fell into a light sleep. She dreamed that she was searching everywhere on the mountainside for the precious treasure box. Each loose rock and mullen stalk looked the same as all the others, and each one appeared to be the right one until she had made a careful search. She awoke with a start, realizing that she was utterly confused and feeling exhausted and discouraged. After going over her plans once more, she again fell into a fitful catnap.

After several hours of restless tossing, Rosemary suddenly sat up in bed, rubbed her eyes, and glanced at her wrist watch. It was a quarter past three. She climbed quietly out of bed and looked out the window, but the moon was nowhere to be seen. A deep purple coverlet was stretched out along the mountain, and Rosemary imagined that God Himself had gently put all the hills to sleep under His own soft eiderdown. The stars were beginning to pale in the first faint beginnings of dawn.

Quietly slipping on her hiking clothes, Rosemary opened the door leading out to the veranda. It stuck at the bottom and came open with a squeak and a jerk, which she thought would surely awaken the entire household. She waited a moment in silence, and when no one stirred she slipped out and slowly closed the door behind her.

For a full minute Rosemary stood entranced. Lake Superior lay at her feet, a glowing green emerald, while the clouds along the distant horizon formed irregular bands of blended color. It seemed as if an indistinct rainbow had become entangled in the meshes of some fairy fisherman's great net. In the opposite direction, the tops of the mountains were still slumbering under their purple eiderdown.

"My, but it's cold," Rosemary said to herself with a shrug, as a keen breath of clean air struck her face, "but I mustn't waste all the morning here."

The next moment she climbed out over the veranda railing, dangling her legs this way and that in an effort to make contact with the porch post. Her fingers were cut on the sharp corners of the railing, and her arms felt as if they were being pulled out of their sockets. Still she couldn't touch the post. In desperation she lowered herself several inches farther and caught hold of the very edge of the veranda. This time her toes found the post, and she let herself down another inch and then another. It was now or never, she thought, as she loosened her grasp in the hope of catching hold of the post.

A moment later she lost her balance altogether and fell to the ground. Luckily Aunt Polly had made a deep soil for her flower bed beneath the edge of the veranda, and Rosemary came down in the very center of the hollyhocks, flat on her back, with her heels in the air. She lay dazed for a minute or two, wondering how many of her bones were broken. When she tried standing and moving about, however, she found that she had been shaken up a bit, but not really hurt.

With ever-growing excitement, Rosemary started at a lively pace up the side of the mountain in the growing dawn. After a time she stopped, out of breath, and begun to look about her for the three trees that stood in a straight line and for the boulder that was like a giant's tooth. Soon she experienced the same confusion she had felt in her dream. Everywhere she looked she saw three trees in a row, and all the trees seemed strangely alike, lifting their scraggly arms against the sky as if in prayer to the beauty of the approaching dawn.

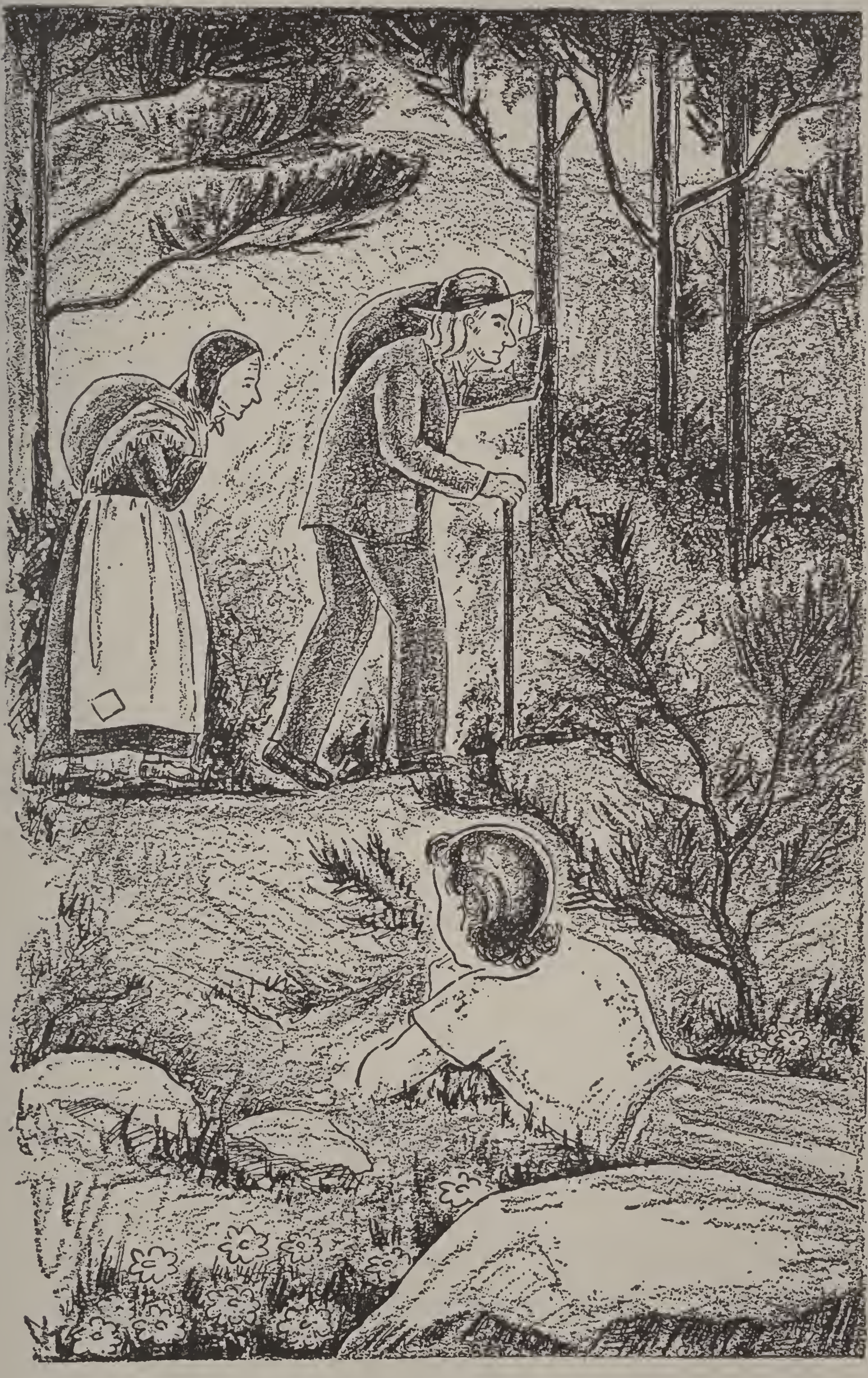
When she started on again, she began dodging this way and that, in a vain effort to locate her hidden treasure box. After a time she wandered far out of her course and stopped near a concealed path which led up to the Old Man of the Mountain. As she paused a moment, she heard footsteps approaching, and hurriedly concealing herself behind a clump of juniper, Rosemary lay perfectly still.

A gaunt, bent old man tugging at a heavy bundle on his back, came first, followed closely by a woman who was short and lean and feeble with age. She also had a bundle across her shoulder. The man's heavy breathing could be clearly heard as he stopped long enough to exchange a few words with his companion.

"Do you suppose anyone has seen us this time? We've never before been out so late in the morning." There was an awed tone in his voice that was to haunt Rosemary for many days.

"I don't think we've been observed," the woman replied in hushed fear. "But let's keep going." As she spoke, she changed her bundle to the other shoulder, and the muffled squawk of a hen emerged from her bag.

Rosemary caught a clear silhouette of the man's face



Rosemary lay perfectly still

against the roseate sky, and it resembled closely her own mental image of Craig Harding. Whether she actually saw it or merely imagined it, she did not know, but she thought there was a long white scar across the man's cheek.

When the two strangers had disappeared, Rosemary sat up and breathed freely again. So this was it. These two old dried-up mummies, who were keeping Claribel a prisoner, had been out robbing chicken coops and gardens. Rosemary knew that she was one step nearer the solution of the mystery.

"Where in the world do you suppose they came from, and who in the world do you suppose they are?" she asked herself as she again took up her search for the mullen stalk and the copper box.

By this time the dawn was in its full beauty, and the entire sky was alight with fleeting, brilliant colors. God was turning back the purple eiderdown as He awakened the hills, one by one, with the white breath of joyous morning.

Rosemary realized suddenly that she had no time to waste, for soon Uncle Hiram and Aunt Polly would be up and would discover that she was missing, and again the entire neighborhood would be called out to search for her.

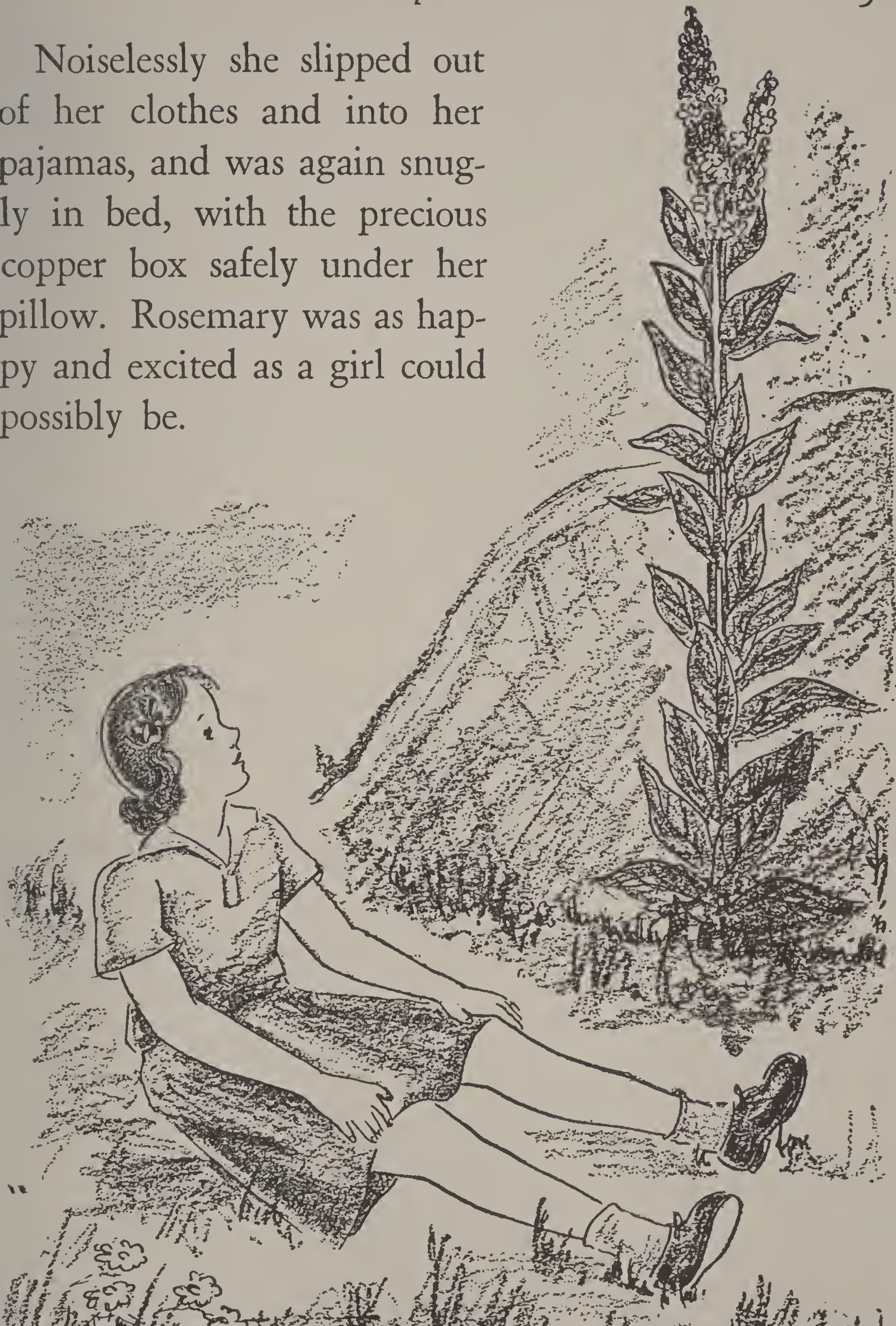
As the confused girl ran here and there in her frantic search, stubbing her toes against the rocks and scratching her hands and legs against the briars, she felt that there was but one chance in a million of locating her treasure. There was no system in her search, for she was running in every direction, wherever her feet happened to take her.

By the merest accident, she tripped over a pine root and fell down beside a great mullen stalk. She looked, and sure enough, it was the one for which she had been searching. Pushing aside the leaves and sticks, Rosemary rescued the precious copper box.

Without wasting a second, she tucked the box under her arm and hurried breathlessly down the mountainside to her Uncle Hiram's home. When she arrived, the house was just as silent as when she had left it. It was then that she realized that not once had she thought of a plan for getting back into the house.

She walked around the house and examined every window, but not a single one was open. She tried the kitchen door and, like a miracle, it opened. In her excitement over Uncle Hiram's story, Aunt Polly had forgotten to turn the night latch for the first time in fifteen years. Softly closing the door, Rosemary glided silently across the kitchen and quickly up the stairs and into Betty's room, quite unaware that Aunt Polly had heard her.

Noiselessly she slipped out of her clothes and into her pajamas, and was again snugly in bed, with the precious copper box safely under her pillow. Rosemary was as happy and excited as a girl could possibly be.



14.

THE MYSTERY THICKENS

"Hiram! Sh! . . . Hiram, listen!" Aunt Polly whispered nervously as she heard Rosemary tiptoe up the creaking stairs. "Don't you hear that strange noise? Somebody's broken open the kitchen door; don't you hear the stairs creak?"

Uncle Hiram awakened from his sound sleep, sat up in bed and listened, but could hear nothing. He was irritated.

"It's only your imagination again. You're always hearing something or other, and it's a pesky bad habit you've got waking me with a start as if the world was coming to an end."

"But I tell you I did hear something, and whatever it was, it's still in the house. Likely enough it's gone upstairs and into the girls' room."

Uncle Hiram's long experience told him that even though his wife was not a Brown, she was even more persistent, at least when it came to imagining an intruder in the house. He had on various occasions made a forced search without finding even a trace of a prowler.

"Well, I'll have no rest, I suppose, till I do get up."

He was now wide awake, and the early dawn was turning into broad daylight. He rolled slowly out of bed, drew on his clothes, and went into the kitchen. He tried the door, and much to his surprise it was unlocked. He could hardly believe that both he and Aunt Polly had forgotten to turn the night latch, but he quietly turned the key now so that she would not accuse him of carelessness. "That story about the Old Man of the Mountain must be responsible," he mumbled to himself, for he knew that after he wound the clock each evening, it was his unfailing habit to see that the doors were secure.

Uncle Hiram was still wondering about the kitchen door when Aunt Polly joined him in the search. Her eyes immediately detected the track of a wet shoe and two or three fragments of red clay near the foot of the stairs.

"My sakes alive," she whispered, "you don't suppose the robber is still in the house!"

"No, I don't figure anything of the sort," replied Uncle Hiram, still somewhat out of patience. "Fact is, I don't think anything is wrong."

"But the door must have been left unlocked, and it's a wonder, Hiram, that we weren't both murdered in our bed."

"Hush your nonsense, Poll. It wouldn't surprise me one bit if Rosemary has been carrying on another of her investigations."

"If she has, it's lucky she isn't my girl," Aunt Polly sputtered, "or I'd put her through a course of sprouts that would cure her of any more such foolishness."

Up the stairs went Uncle Hiram, and following close at his heels came the excited Aunt Polly with the stove poker in her hand.

They searched the spare room first, and then looked in to see if Betty and Rosemary were both in bed. Betty was sound asleep, breathing with a long, slow, even cadence, but Rosemary lay perfectly silent, listening.

"They seem to be all right," Uncle Hiram smiled, as he stepped back to close the door. But Aunt Polly's suspicious eyes had already seen the telltale shoes, still wet with the morning dew and stained with the red clay of the mountainside. She picked up the shoes and gave one to Uncle Hiram to inspect.

"Rosemary," said Aunt Polly sternly, "what in the world have you been up to this time?"

Rosemary meekly sat up in bed, shook her bobbed hair back from her face, and answered frankly, "I've only been on an errand a short way up the mountain."

"An errand at this time of the morning!" Aunt Polly's tone showed her displeasure in spite of herself.

"Out with it, young lady," Uncle Hiram added with a dry smile. "You see we've caught you redhanded."

"But it's just a little secret of mine," Rosemary replied, trying to be very polite.

"Girls your age shouldn't have any such secrets," Aunt Polly continued, somewhat reprovingly.

"But Aunt Polly, there's nothing wrong with having an innocent secret, is there?"

"If it takes you back to the top of the mountain," Uncle Hiram explained, "we figure it's wrong."

"But I wasn't at the top of the mountain this time, Uncle Hiram, and besides, I haven't any intention of ever going back to see the Old Man of the Mountain again."

"I'm sure glad to hear you say that, for your Aunt Polly and I both know that it's for your own good to stay as far away from the top of Mystery Mountain as you can."

"You haven't yet told us what you were doing outdoors so early in the morning," Aunt Polly persisted.

"You see it was like this," Rosemary explained honestly. "On my first trip down the mountain, I left something behind which is very valuable. Naturally, I knew if I asked your permission to go back to get it, you would be afraid for my safety. So what was there left for me to do? The easiest way out was for me to go before you were awake. Of course I tried not to disturb you, but evidently I did."

"And what was it you left behind?" Aunt Polly persisted.

"It was something very private and something I can't tell you about just now. But I will tell you and Uncle Hiram everything after you have finished the story about the Old Man of the Mountain."

"I certainly hope you've satisfied your curiosity now," Uncle Hiram smiled, "for we'll all be nervous wrecks if this sort of thing goes on much longer."

"I'm terribly sorry if I've caused you more trouble," Rosemary apologized sincerely.

"Oh, no, it's not that," Uncle Hiram answered, "you're no trouble at all, only a sort of riddle to us, for you're so different from Betty and so supercharged with curiosity."

With the mention of her name, Betty wakened with a start.

"What's the matter now?" she asked innocently.

"Oh, nothing much," Uncle Hiram answered as he stooped over and kissed her. Then suddenly conscious of the passing of time, he moved toward the door. "My goodness, Poll, I figure we'll have to start making breakfast right away if I'm to have my usual three cups of coffee in time to get to work."

"You're right, Hiram, work before play. Or curiosity either!" Aunt Polly grinned as she led the way downstairs.

When they had gone, Betty turned anxiously to Rosemary. "What is all this about? You were at the window when I went to sleep, and you're here in bed when I awaken."

"True enough, but I made an excursion up the mountain while you were dreaming. It's your mother that has the owl's eyes and pussy's ears. She doesn't miss a single sound; she heard me when I sneaked back into the house."

"But where did you go?"

Rosemary looked straight into Betty's eyes, as she asked in a low, serious tone, "Can you keep another secret, cross your heart, without even telling a single person?"

"Try me," Betty smiled.

"But can you keep a very great secret, that's the question?"

"Of course I can," Betty assured her, solemnly crossing her heart.

Rosemary then drew the copper box from beneath her pillow. Both girls looked at the engraving on top.

"This box came from the inside of the boulder that has the bronze inscription on its side," Rosemary explained in a whisper. "As I was bringing the box back with me after I first discovered it, I accidentally met Tyne and Tad and Hen, who were planning to scare me, and so I had to hide the box. You can't blame me for not being able to wait any longer to get it, especially after hearing what your father said about the spirit of Craig Harding pointing with his cane. I couldn't sleep because I was so worried that someone might find the box before I could go back for it. After tossing about most of the night, I simply went out while everyone was still asleep and recovered the box, and here it is."

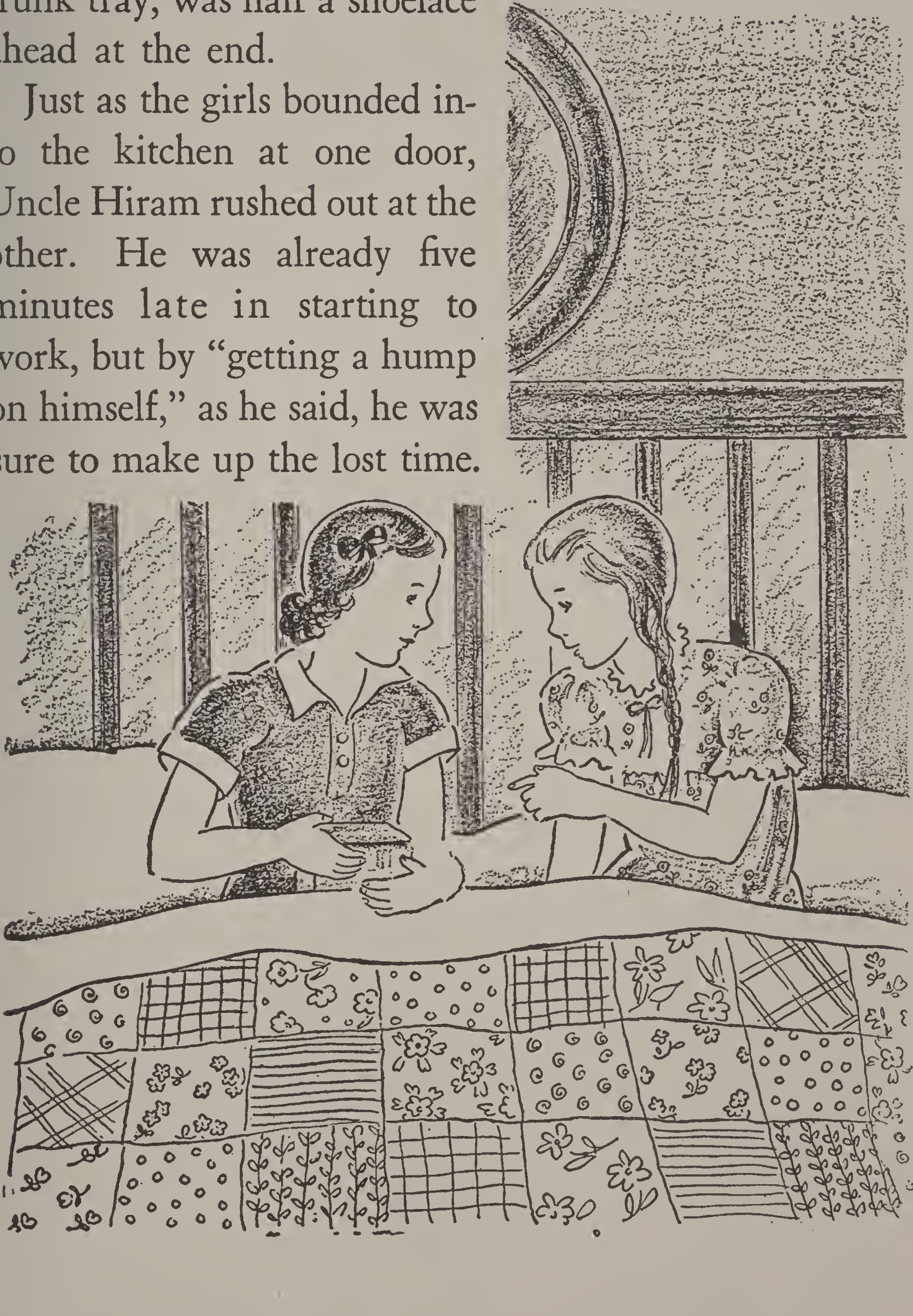
"Why, Rosemary, you're a wonder, really you are, and some day you're going to be a Pinkerton detective or a G-Man or something."

"I might think so myself, if I had known how to get in through the door and up the stairs without waking your mother. But Betty, this box has very important papers inside it, if we can only find some way to pry it open."

"Why not let the box wait till after breakfast," Betty suggested. "I'm just as curious to know what's in it as you are, but Mother doesn't like to keep breakfast waiting every morning."

With this, the two girls ran a race to see who could get dressed first, and Rosemary, in spite of the fact that she had to hide the copper box in the bottom of her trunk tray, was half a shoelace ahead at the end.

Just as the girls bounded into the kitchen at one door, Uncle Hiram rushed out at the other. He was already five minutes late in starting to work, but by "getting a hump on himself," as he said, he was sure to make up the lost time.



15.

THE TELEGRAM

While Rosemary and Betty were still eating their breakfast, there was a loud clattering of the doorbell.

"Who in the nation can be calling at this hour?" Aunt Polly commented as she stripped off her apron and went to the door. A minute later she called in excitement, "A telegram for you, Rosemary!"

While Rosemary was rushing to the door, Aunt Polly again read the address, "Miss Rosemary Brown, care of Hiram Brown." Surely somebody must be dead. People didn't send telegrams for any other reason. Aunt Polly's feeling was so intense that she stood motionless, a large tear forming in each eye. Rosemary hurriedly signed her name, tore open the envelope, and read:

Chicago, Illinois

Miss Rosemary Brown
Harkins Mountain Avenue
Marquette, Michigan

NO WORD FROM YOU STOP HAS ANYTHING HAPPENED STOP CAN COME SUNDAY MORNING IF YOU NEED ME STOP WIRE REPLY IMMEDIATELY

Dad

By the time Rosemary had regained her senses, the messenger had gone. She ran into the street to call him back, but all she could see was his bobbing cap as his bicycle disappeared down the mountainside.

"Has anything happened to your father? He isn't dead?" Aunt Polly asked in an awed whisper, when Rosemary came back into the house.

"Why, no, Aunt Polly," Rosemary smiled in amused relief. "But I'm terribly ashamed of myself. I haven't kept my promise, and my Daddy-Doc has always been considerate and thoughtful of me. And to think that I haven't even written him once since I arrived. I promised to send him a wire as soon as I got here. And here it is two whole days and nights. Oh, I'm *so* humiliated."

"And what does he say, then, if there's nothing serious wrong with him?" Aunt Polly asked as she became calmer.

Betty's emotions changed from dread expectation to amusement as she stood watching the scene.

"Listen, Aunt Polly, this is the telegram," and Rosemary read it aloud.

"Huh! And is that all!" Aunt Polly commented in disappointment. "Well, bless my soul, but I never heard of people wasting their money on telegrams like this before."

"But it isn't wasted money," Rosemary explained. "I'm the only child my Daddy-Doc has, you know, and he has a perfect right to know what's happened to me, and in a hurry if he wishes."

"Yes, I suppose he has the right to waste his money on you," Aunt Polly smiled, "though I doubt if you're quite worth all the expense," she concluded, somewhat put out, as she went back to her kitchen work.

As soon as Betty and Rosemary were alone, Rosemary said, "Betty, you'll have to go with me to the telegraph office right away. I must send a telegram this very minute. I know Daddy-Doc's worried to death about me."

"But I don't know where the telegraph office is," Betty admitted, ashamed of her ignorance.

"You don't!" Rosemary looked at Betty in amazement.

"But you see, Rosemary," Betty apologized, "I haven't ever had to send a telegram, and besides, the only one my father ever received, that I can remember, was when Grandpa Brown died, and that was several years ago."

"I don't blame you in the least, Betty, but we must start immediately."

Rosemary led the way into the kitchen where Aunt Polly was deep in the dishwashing.

"We're going downtown to send a telegram to Daddy-

Doc, Aunt Polly," Rosemary announced promptly.

"We? You mean you and Betty?" Aunt Polly asked, not so sure that two girls could send anything as important as a telegram without her aid.

"Betty and I, of course."

"The telegraph office is on the corner of Front and Washington streets," Aunt Polly explained, trying to be of some help. "You'll see the sign in the window. You'll know the building by the clock in the steeple."

While the girls were upstairs getting ready for their trip downtown, Aunt Polly commented to herself as she bustled about her housework, "I don't see how in the world girls the age of Rosemary can be so sure they can send a telegram. Why, when I was that age I'd no more think of sending a telegram than I'd think of flying to the moon. Makes one feel like an old fogey, sure enough."

Soon the girls were on their way down the mountainside, and as they passed Tad and Hen's house, Tad called out, "Why don't you ever come down to play? We're going to have a grand circus here in our barn. Remember you're going to give us your dance act."

"Of course we're going to help with the circus," Rosemary replied, and then added, "But say, do you and Hen know how to make a box kite?"

"Box kite! Sure, we've already got a box kite here in the barn. You come in and we'll fly it right off," Tad answered promptly, fascinated by the vivacious, self-reliant Rosemary.

"Oh, we haven't time just this minute," Rosemary smiled. "We'll be back later. We've an errand first."

"Yes, we're going down to send a telegram to Rosemary's father in Chicago," Betty announced proudly.

"You never are!" Hen answered skeptically. "You're not dead, are you?"

Rosemary laughed outright. "We don't exactly look like ghosts, do we?"

Tyne had overheard the conversation and came running across the street so that she would not miss out on a single thing. She announced abruptly a moment later, "I'm going along with you."

"But do you know how to send a telegram?" Rosemary asked with a suppressed smile.

"No, not exactly, but I could soon learn, couldn't I?"

"Well, then," Rosemary said with decision, "since you can't be of any help to us, you had best stay here with Tad and Hen and help with the circus till we get back. It will take a lot of practice to get it ready for the public. Tyne, you help Tad with the tight-rope act, or try leaping through the hoop, or—"

"I'll do anything to please you," Tad beamed with youthful ardor.

"Goodbye, Tyne," Rosemary called over her shoulder as she and Betty hurried away. "You run right along and let Tad help you with your circus act, and Betty and I will be back before you've even had the chance to miss us."

For once Tyne's bumptious nerve had met its Waterloo, and as the two girls went on gaily down to the telegraph office, Tyne looked after them enviously, saying, "Who'd ever want to send an old telegram when one can write a letter so much easier?"

Tad with his eyes still full of the vivacious Rosemary, replied simply, "Sour grapes!"

On their way, Rosemary said, "It's really hard on one's nerves to be as excited as I've been about the Old Man of the Mountain ever since I arrived. I've forgotten my good manners and have neglected my Daddy-Doc, and I don't know whether or not he'll ever quite forgive me."

"But what message are you going to send to your father?" Betty asked, her face full of the new significance that life had suddenly taken on.

"Oh, I'll just tell him the truth, I imagine," Rosemary replied with unconcern, fascinated for the moment with the sparkling blue expanse of the lake in front of her.

As the girls reached the foot of the mountain, they turned to their left into Lake Street. Betty again asked with added seriousness, "But won't you have to be careful about the number of words? Dad once said that you had to pay ten or fifteen or twenty cents a word in a telegram, and you'll have to watch and not use a single one that's not really necessary."

Disregarding Betty's suggestion of thrift, Rosemary turned her undivided attention to the scenery about her. "Wouldn't you love to be out sailing in that big sloop?" she commented, her eyes full of wonder.

"But aren't you going to give serious thought to the telegram?" Betty repeated.

Rosemary only replied, "Don't you simply adore Lake Superior?"

"Well, there's the clock in the steeple," Betty announced with a feeling of importance at being the guide for such a nonchalant sender of telegrams.

At last the two girls were in the telegraph office, and Betty was completely fascinated as the tickers noisily tapped out in code the personal and impersonal secrets of the world. It seemed uncanny to her, and she didn't at all understand how they could do it.

The clerk handed Rosemary a blank form, and she began to compose the message for her father. Soon she handed it to Betty, asking her opinion of what she had written.

"I think it's fine," Betty commented, proud of her growing importance, "but haven't you used more words than are really necessary? Here are two words I am sure you can do without."

When it was finished, the telegram read as follows:

Marquette, Michigan

Dr. William D. J. Brown
307 Kaye Court
Chicago, Illinois

I AM WELL AND HAPPY STOP HAVE BEEN BUSY EVERY MINUTE SINCE I ARRIVED STOP I AM TRYING TO SOLVE THE EXCITING MYSTERY SURROUNDING THE OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN STOP I'D LOVE TO HAVE YOU COME SUNDAY STOP HAVE LOTS TO TELL YOU ABOUT MYSTERY MOUNTAIN BUT A TELEGRAM IS TOO SMALL TO BEGIN TO HOLD IT STOP DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME STOP UNCLE HIRAM SAYS I'M ONE HUNDRED PERCENT BROWN AND CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF STOP LOVE

Rosemary

"That sounds wonderful," Betty approved with deep admiration.

"It will at least tell Daddy-Doc I'm alive, even if I have been absent-minded," Rosemary added as they left the office.

16.

THE IRON ORE DOCK

"Well, that's finished," Rosemary commented as she and Betty stepped out into the street.

"It isn't half as hard to send a telegram as I thought it was going to be," Betty admitted, drawing a relieved breath.

Changing the subject, Rosemary asked excitedly, "It isn't far to the place where your father works, is it? This is the best chance we'll have to go to the top of the iron Ore Dock and see it for ourselves."

"It's so high that it makes your head swim," Betty hesitated.

"But we're quite used to climbing, and I know Uncle Hiram will be glad to see us," Rosemary spoke confidently, as she and Betty started down the street.

"I'm not so sure," Betty commented, trying to change Rosemary's mind. "Dad hasn't ever forbidden me to visit him, but I think he would have, if he thought I'd ever try it."

"But Uncle Hiram will excuse you for my sake. He'll realize that it's his duty to show a visitor all the sights. And besides, I'm simply crazy to see how the Old Man of the Mountain looks from the dock."

The girls were now walking down Front Street, and their conversation was interrupted by the loud chugging of a railroad engine from an overhead bridge.

"There goes another train load of iron ore out on the dock," Betty explained. "If we're actually going to climb to the top of the dock, we'll have to turn here toward the lake."

"Of course we're going to visit Uncle Hiram," Rosemary replied happily, as she took Betty's hand and led her into the narrow cross-street.

Soon the girls were climbing the first long flight of steel steps that began the zigzag course up and up along the side of the towering dock, like a fire escape on a skyscraper. Rosemary was ahead, hurrying upward.

Betty followed as best she could. There was nothing solid for her eyes to rest upon, as she looked down between the steel treads into dizzy space. Her head was beginning to feel as light as a balloon. She feared that she could never get to the top, but she knew that it was impossible to stop Rosemary.

Finally, when she was almost out of breath, Betty called, "Rosemary, wait! Please wait!"

Rosemary sat down on a landing, where she happened to be at the moment, and looked about her. What fun it would be, she thought, if one could step off into space and float gradually into the clouds. When Betty reached the landing, she sat down, trembling, beside Rosemary, clutching the rail with her hand, for she felt weak and dizzy. "Do you think we'll ever reach the top?" she whispered hoarsely.

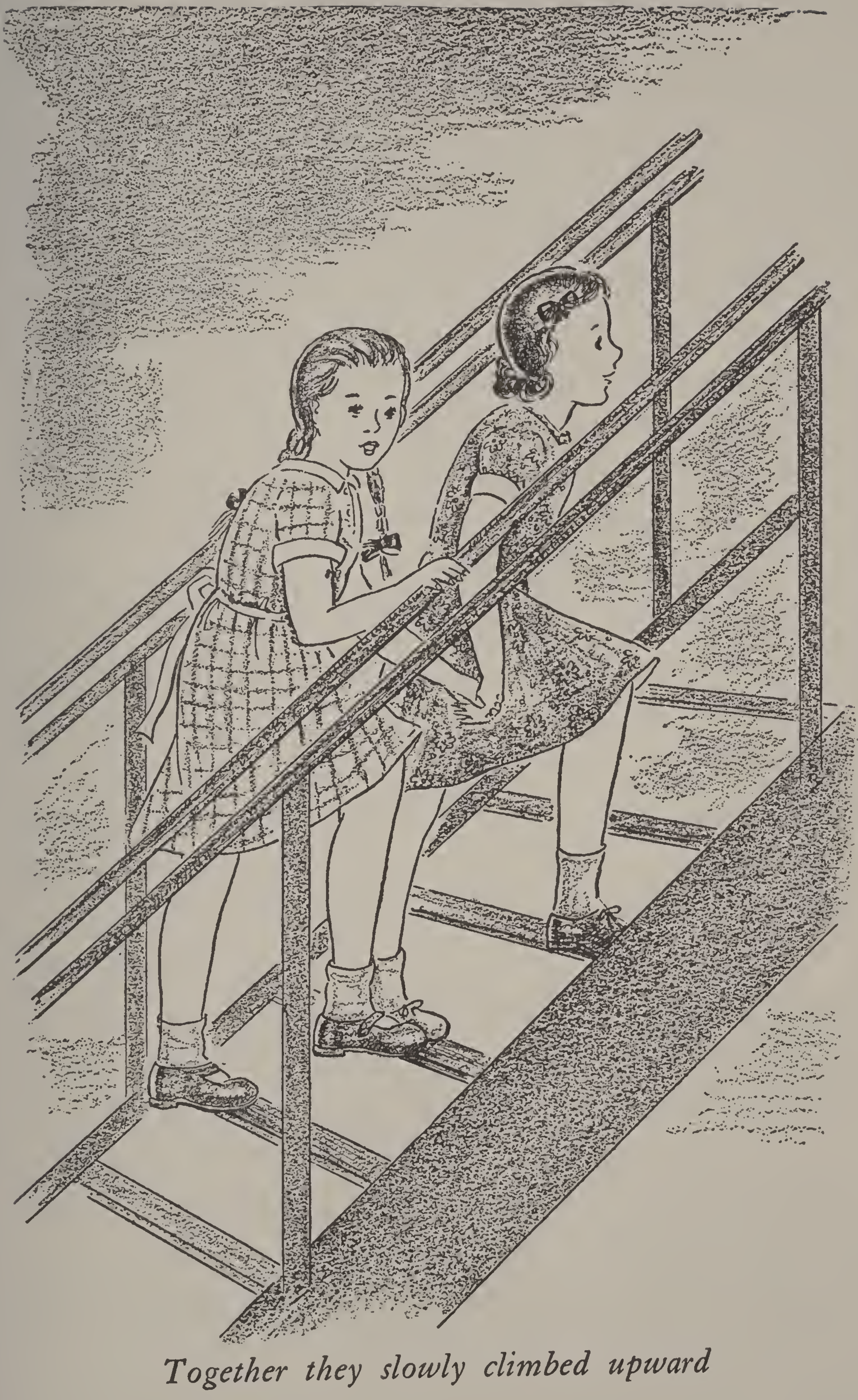
"Certainly," Rosemary smiled as she looked upward. "There are only nine more flights of stairs, and we've already climbed five."

"Nine more!" Betty gasped, "and there are twenty-four steps to each flight, for I've counted them. Already I feel all shaky and trembly."

"I feel as if I could climb and climb forever," Rosemary smiled. "All you've got to do, Betty, is to look up and not down, out and not in. Come, take my hand."

Betty stood up nervously, clutching Rosemary's hand and the railing, and together they slowly climbed upward. Betty's courage had entirely deserted her, but in Rosemary's heart there was a lilting song of wide, free spaces.

"We're making progress," Rosemary grinned as they reached the next platform. "Betty, I'd give a million dollars to be a bird. If only I had the wings of that herring gull, I'd sail and sail, up and up into the blue



Together they slowly climbed upward

heavens. Wouldn't it be thrilling to ride on one of those fluffy, golden clouds!"

"But don't you try jumping off these crazy steps," Betty cautioned with chattering teeth, clinging tighter to Rosemary's hand. "If only you weren't so foolhardy, I wouldn't be half so afraid."

Betty's eyes were now blurred from looking so closely at the small rectangles of empty space between the steps. She had never before been so high above the ground, and she was vowing to herself that if ever she got down alive, she would never be so foolish again.

At last they were safe on the solid surface at the top of the great dock, a hundred and fifty feet above the water.

"It makes me feel as lighthearted as a bird," Rosemary shouted, looking joyously about her, her arms outspread like wings.

"I wish I didn't feel so dizzy and weak," Betty murmured.

"You're such a funny girl, Betty," Rosemary laughed.

"And you're funnier still," Betty smiled with a wry twist of her mouth, "but as Mother says, we're each of us just as God made us, and that's that."

The top of the dock was a complete new world within itself, separate and apart. Three railroad tracks ran parallel, with a wide platform on either side. Beneath these were rows of great pockets, into which trainload after trainload of iron ore was dumped. An army of men, with long wooden poles, prodded the clinging ore from the cars after the bottoms had been tripped. With a clanging roar, the ore leaped into the dock pockets and raised a cloud of reddish-brown dust. This settled over the faces of the men, making them as coppery as Indians, and shining like polished rusty metal along the surface of their clothes.

Another army of men, with much longer wooden poles, prodded the iron ore from the dock pockets and sent it rushing down the long inclined troughs and into the hold of a waiting iron ore freighter. Each new flow of ore resounded with a deep booming sound and sent upward a cloud of stifling dust.

Here and there the switch engine pushed and pulled the creaking cars with an explosive grinding din, all the while giving off sooty, smelly smoke that settled in a clinging greasy grime over everybody and everything.

Uncle Hiram was as busy as a beaver directing the men so that no time should be lost in loading the waiting ore freighter. Wherever he came, the men quickened their motions; but when his back was turned, they relaxed their efforts.

At first Rosemary was too excited with her immediate surroundings to look beyond the surface of the dock, but after a time the wind shifted and blew the smoke and dust to one side. She looked out across the deep indigo-blue surface of Lake Superior, and in the distance saw a great schooner sailing slowly toward the bay, looking like a toy boat on a painted ocean.

"Isn't it wonderful!" Rosemary exclaimed gaily.

"Yes, it is really pretty after one gets used to it," Betty admitted, still too nervous to look far for fear she might tumble off into empty space.

Soon Rosemary's eyes turned to the Old Man of the Mountain. It seemed a long distance away, and from here it looked merely like a stately castle standing majestically atop Mystery Mountain. For the first time, since Rosemary had come to Marquette, the mystery seemed but a far-away dream.

"Do you suppose, Betty, that Claribel Lee is sitting in that turret this very minute, looking down at this dock and wondering what we two dots are doing?"

"Maybe she is," Betty agreed without enthusiasm.

"You'll have to help me remember to get rope for the ladder to rescue her before we go back to your house."

"I don't believe we can ever free Claribel with any home-made kite. I've watched Tad and Hen wreck kites too often to believe the plan will succeed."

"But there's one chance out of a hundred that we can free Claribel, and it's worth the trial."

At this moment Uncle Hiram saw the two girls and came toward them, with a look of surprise on his face.

"I figure you're out seeing more sights," he smiled, his face shining as if a bootblack had polished it.

"That's right, Uncle Hiram. The lake and the mountains are wonderful this morning! Wouldn't it be fun to float about on one of those fluffy clouds or to sail gracefully through the air like a herring gull! And see how the shades of greens and blues keep changing in the water. Isn't Nature wonderful!"

Uncle Hiram was astonished at Rosemary's imagination. He worked here day after day in plain sight of the rarest beauty in the world, but his eyes and his thoughts were constantly on his work, and only on rare occasions did they ever stray from the grimy surface of the dock.

"Even the Old Man of the Mountain seems majestic and beautiful from this distance and height," Rosemary chattered. "But when you're near, it's entirely different. And that reminds me, Uncle Hiram, you're going to tell me the rest of the story about Craig Harding this evening."

Uncle Hiram seemed not to hear what Rosemary was saying. "I'm surprised, Betty, that you ever ventured up here."

"We were downtown sending a telegram, and Rosemary decided she wanted to climb to the top of the dock, and here we are," and Betty tilted her head proudly.

"A telegram!" Uncle Hiram came to sudden attention.

"Yes, my Daddy-Doc wanted to know what had become of me," Rosemary answered with unconcern. "You see, I've been so completely excited about everything in Marquette that I forgot to tell him I had arrived safely, and so he wired for an instant explanation."

"Oh, is that all!" Uncle Hiram replied in a relieved tone, as his mind went back to his work. There were a dozen dust-covered Finnish and Swedish workmen leaning on their wooden poles and lazily watching him. "I see I'll have to get back on the job and attend to business. Now be careful, and watch your step climbing down the crazy narrow stairway. And Rosemary, don't take any needless risk!"

With quick strides, Uncle Hiram vanished among the men. Rosemary turned again from the dock to the fleeting wonder and beauty of the natural scenery. The clouds had shifted and their colors had become quite different. For the moment the sun was hidden behind a cloud, and the tinting of the water and the sky was even softer and more fascinating. This was, indeed, a world apart. It seemed to Rosemary as if Nature had splashed her colors lavishly, in an attempt to please Rosemary's own sensitive being.

After a time, Betty lost her sense of fear and filled her soul with the beauty everywhere about her. "You know, Rosemary," she confided, "I think I'll make a poem about this when we get home."

"There's beauty here to make a hundred poems," Rosemary answered in a dreamy mood, as they still lingered.

The descent along the dizzy zigzag flight of stairs seemed even more perilous than the ascent. The steel structure was like a frail spiderweb spanning empty space. There was nothing solid to support the eye or give any feeling of security.

"If ever I get down alive," Betty shuddered as she crouched and clung and felt her way, "I'll let this be the last excursion of this sort."

"I'd like to come up here every day," said Rosemary enthusiastically, "if one could only blow the iron dust and the engine's grimy breath away, it would be a world of complete beauty, constantly changing but always thrilling."

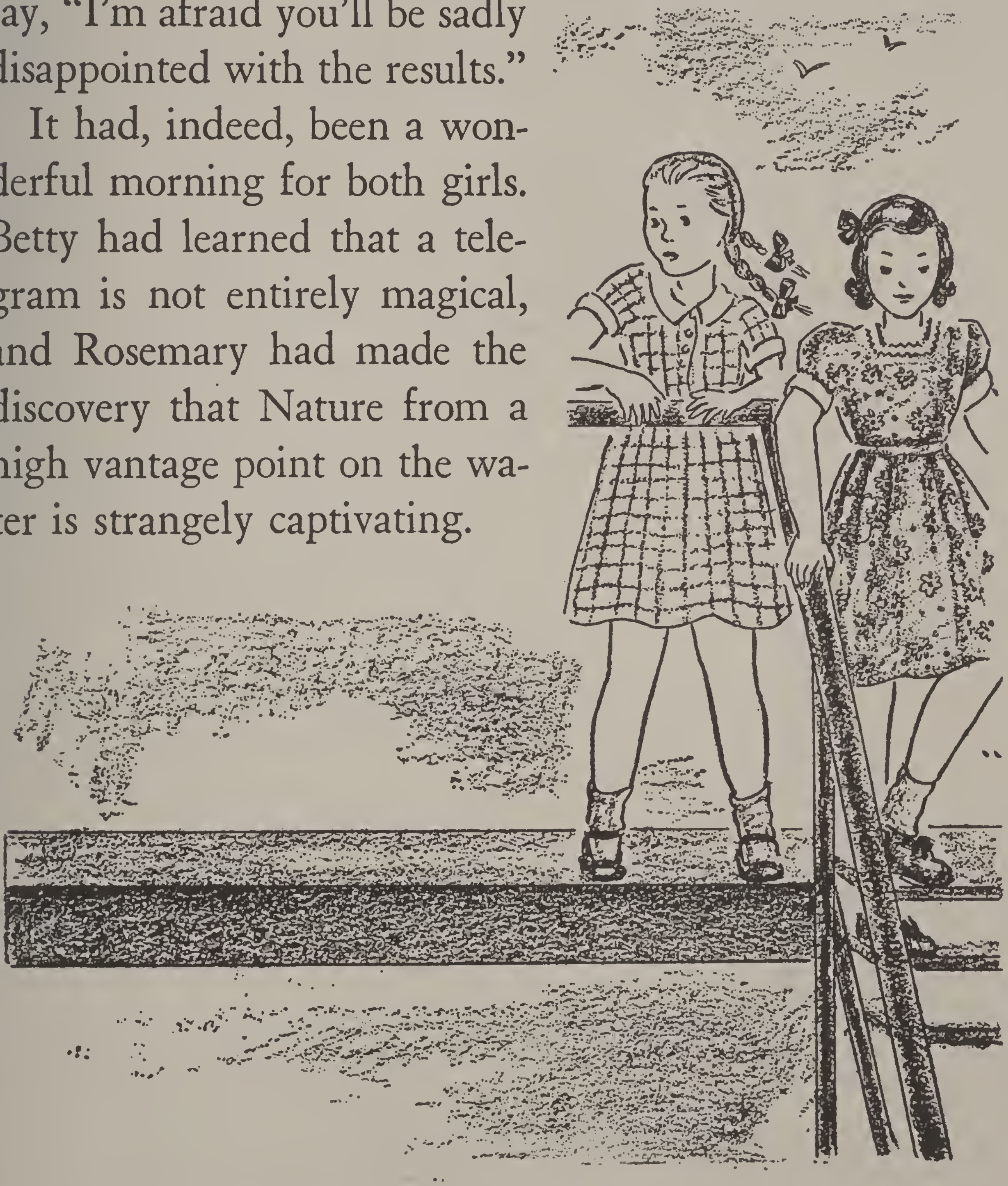
At last the girls were again on the solid earth. Betty breathed deep and long as the intense fear went out of her face and the tremor from her knees.

Rosemary now remembered her other errand. After locating the proper store, she and Betty purchased a bundle of rope and then started homeward.

On their way up the mountain, Rosemary commented cheerfully, "Now we'll soon see what Tad and Hen can do with a box kite."

"Yes, we shall see," Betty answered doubtfully, as if to say, "I'm afraid you'll be sadly disappointed with the results."

It had, indeed, been a wonderful morning for both girls. Betty had learned that a telegram is not entirely magical, and Rosemary had made the discovery that Nature from a high vantage point on the water is strangely captivating.



17.

A CIRCUS IN THE MAKING

On the way back home, Rosemary and Betty remembered the circus and also the rope and the kite, so they stopped at Tad and Hen's barn. Snooks greeted them with his silly grin and his tail flapped in wide, erratic circles like a bedraggled dust mop. Tad was busy skinning the cat on his newly devised trapeze, and Hen was practicing cartwheels and walking on his hands.

"Where's the rest of the show?" Rosemary asked in amusement.

"Tyne is sour grapes!" Tad replied with a wry face.

"Why, isn't she going to do her act?" Betty asked in surprise.

"She only wants to be coaxed," Hen sniffed.

"Well, then, you'll have to do the coaxing," Rosemary laughed.

"I will not!" Hen answered as he did another cartwheel.

"Betty, you'll have to coax her," Tad insisted.

"Yes, I suppose I will," Betty answered, willing as usual to undertake anything for the sake of harmony.

"But what's your act going to be, Betty?" Hen asked.

"I don't exactly know," she replied modestly. "Perhaps we could dress Snooks to look like a Bengal tiger, and then I could be his trainer and put him through his paces."

"But you'll have to make the jacket to put over Snook's back," Tad asserted. "And maybe you can also do a sword dance or something really exciting."

"I'll decide what I can do," Betty agreed. "I think I can work a few sleight-of-hand tricks."

"Rosemary, you need some more practice on your dance," Tad interrupted, sitting on his trapeze as in a swing. He pretended to be very serious about the circus, but what he really wanted was to see the dance again.

"Very well, and what's the matter with this?" Rosemary laughed, laying aside the bundle of rope and beginning to dance. Instantly she was transformed into a fairylike creature, all grace and beauty.

"Now what's your criticism?" she asked when she had finished.

"You're wonderful!" Tad beamed. "The only trouble is that your dance is too short. You'll at least have to double its length when you give it on the circus program."

"You are very kind," Rosemary smiled, "and I feel very flattered." Then suddenly remembering her errand, she asked, "But how about that box kite?"

"Oh, yes," Tad answered, jumping down from his trapeze and running to the shed. The next moment he was back with the kite in one hand and a large ball of twine in the other.

"Will it fly very, very high?" Rosemary asked, examining it carefully.

"High? I should say so!" Tad bragged. "Why, the man in the moon has to duck his head when we get her going."

"And we've a mile of string," Hen added, "and believe me, you've got to hold tight to keep her from getting away from you."

"Will it carry a load as heavy as this bundle?" Rosemary asked.

Tad tested the weight of the bundle first in one hand and then in the other and felt with his fingers until he was sure he knew what the bundle contained.

"In a good wind she'll carry this package like a feather," he replied confidently.

"Good!" exclaimed Rosemary. "And how much will you take for your kite and string?"

Tad was so surprised that at first he didn't know what to say. He looked at Hen for a signal, but Hen was silent. The boys had traded a thousand trinkets with other boys, but they had never sold anything for real money to a girl.

"You haven't a knife or something you'll trade, have you?" Tad stammered.

"Will ten cents be enough?" Rosemary asked.

Tad thought for a minute. "If you'll make it a quarter, and then give Hen fifteen cents for his share, we'll call it square."

"It's a bargain," Rosemary answered, opening her purse.

"It's not a bargain till I get a quarter the same as Tad," Hen insisted.

"Very well, here's your money, Tad, and yours too, Hen. And it's distinctly understood that neither of you is to breathe a single word of this to anybody. You're not even to tell Tyne that we are flying a kite." Rosemary spoke very seriously, and the boys wondered what was in her mind.

"You needn't worry," Tad promised with emphasis.

"Of course Tyne does have eyes of her own," Hen grinned. "But she'll have to see for herself, for we're not telling."

Without further delay, Rosemary gathered up the kite and the ball of string and marched quickly home, with Betty close at her heels. The next minute the kite and the string and the bundle of rope were safely stowed away in Uncle Hiram's tool shed, on top of the lawn mower and the garden hose.

They closed the shed door and started for Betty's room by way of the kitchen. Here they encountered Aunt Polly, who at the moment was rolling out another pie crust.

"I suppose you got the telegram off all right?" she asked, looking up from her work. "At least you've been gone long enough to send a hundred messages all the way round the world."

"Oh, yes, Aunt Polly, we sent the telegram without the least difficulty," Rosemary answered blithely.

"But really, Mother," Betty added, "it wasn't half as hard as I thought it was going to be."

"Then what are you up to now, coming into the kitchen on cat's feet as if you were robbers or spies or something?" Aunt Polly asked, her eyes filled with laughter.

"Oh, nothing much," Rosemary smiled, "just now we're on our way up to Betty's room."

"But what kept you so long?"

"We went to the top of the iron Ore Dock to visit Uncle Hiram," Rosemary replied truthfully.

"Well, I never in my life saw such a girl as you are, Rosemary. It's the eighth wonder of the world that you didn't fall and break your neck. But you didn't go up, too, did you, Betty?"

"Yes, I did, Mother."

"It wasn't Betty's fault in the least, Aunt Polly," Rosemary insisted. "I had the hardest time coaxing her to go all the way to the top with me. If you could once see the gorgeous view of the lake and the mountains from the top of the dock, you would want to go, too."

"You're surely one strange child, Rosemary," Aunt Polly continued, as she began stirring up a batch of cookies. "What in the world won't you be doing next!"

"There are lots of things still to do," Rosemary laughed as she and Betty started upstairs.

"What kind of letter shall we send in the kite to Claribel Lee?" Rosemary began excitedly, as soon as the girls reached Betty's room.

"I don't know exactly," Betty answered with a blank stare.

"Well then, think!" Rosemary suggested, her brows contracted in serious concentration. "Think hard!"

There was a long minute of silence, and then Rosemary announced with decision, "The letter needs to be written on a large sheet of paper so that Claribel can't help finding it."

"Yes," Betty agreed, "that's right," and she went to a drawer and found a sheet of red wrapping paper which she and Rosemary decided would be quite satisfactory.

"And our letter needs to assure Claribel, the very first thing, that we're her true friends and that we mean to help her."

"Yes, but won't she be suspicious anyway?" Betty replied with feeling, "I know I would."

"Not if you were a prisoner the same as Claribel is. For then any change would be a change for the better."

"Well, perhaps," Betty agreed without being convinced.

"Suppose we begin, 'We're two girls just like you, Claribel.' "

"That sounds fine," Betty commented with fresh enthusiasm.

After half an hour of writing and rewriting, the letter was finally copied on the piece of red wrapping paper. The girls scanned it proudly, and then Rosemary read it to Betty to make sure there were no mistakes.

> Dear Claribel,
>
> We're two girls just like you, Claribel. We want very, very much to help you. We know it must be very dreadful to be imprisoned by two old withered, witch-like mummies. Remember we're your friends, for we do so want to help free you.
>
> Now read these directions carefully:
>
> *First:* The bundle of rope you will find tied to the kite is for you to use in making a ladder. Tie a series of simple knots in it a foot apart, and then fasten the end

of the rope to your bedpost. Do this, of course, when the old withered witch-like mummies aren't watching.

Second: When the two old mummies are sound asleep, throw the free end of the rope out the window, and slide carefully down to safety. Only don't slide too fast. If you do, you'll come down with a crash and blister your hands, and maybe awaken the old mummies.

Third: Hurry through the nearest opening between the steel pickets, and then run the shortest way down the mountain.

Fourth: When you reach a barbed-wire fence coming down, stop and look around a bit. The house you will see nearest you will have a green-trimmed front porch. Well, this house is where we live, your two best friends. And be sure the house has green trimmings.

Fifth: Walk right up to the side of the house nearest you, just as if you had always been acquainted. You'll find a long pole lying under the window. Pick up the pole without making any noise, and tap the upstairs window nearest the front porch three times. Don't tap hard enough to break the glass. The three taps is the signal, and we'll know right away that it's you, Claribel.

Sixth: Caution! If a man appears when you least expect, speak to him as if you always had known him and he was an old friend. Just say to him: "How do you do, Mr. Hiram Brown. Excuse me, but I'm looking for Rosemary and Betty." This Hiram Brown is a very kind man, and is Betty's father and Rosemary's uncle. Of course this man will not appear unless you make a noise that awakens Rosemary's Aunt Polly, and she sends him out to investigate.

Seventh: When Rosemary and Betty hear your three taps at their window, they'll be right out and bring you into the house.

Eighth: Don't be frightened at anything or anybody. We're your very good friends, and the sooner you become acquainted with us the better it will be all the way around.

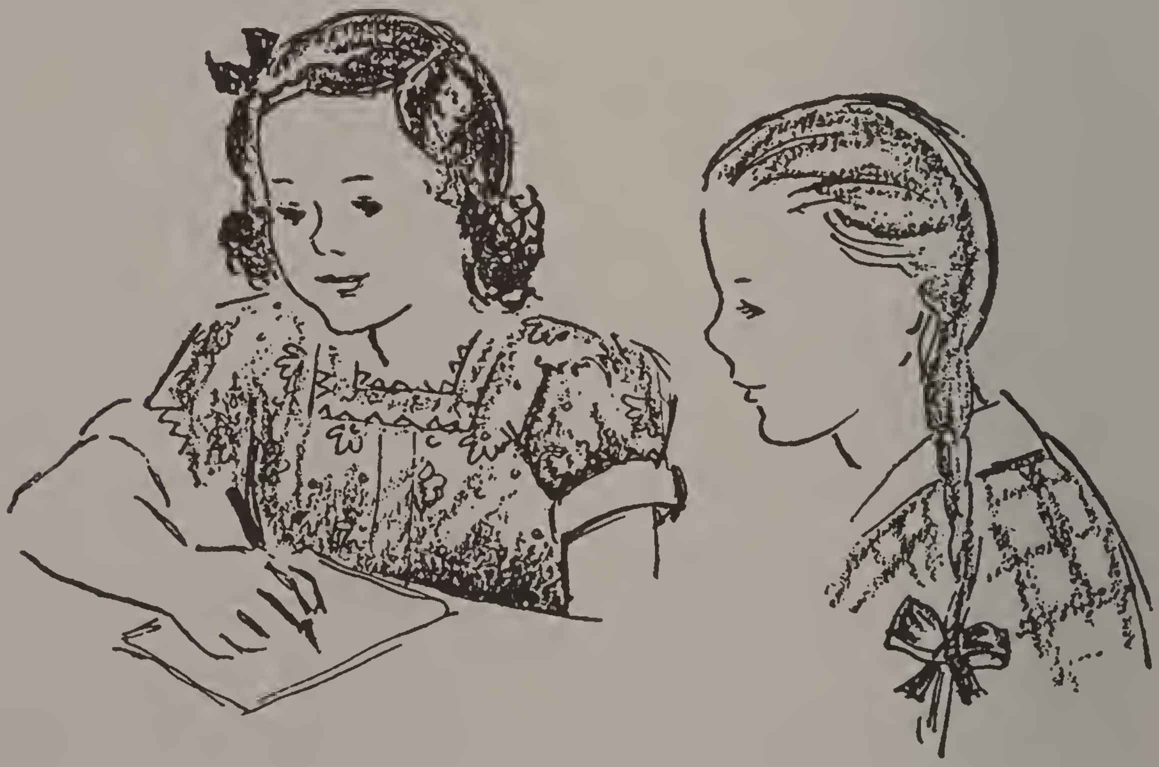
Ninth: Don't forget that we'll be waiting every night till we hear your three taps at our window.

Your best friends,
Rosemary Brown
Betty Brown

"What do you think of it?" Rosemary whispered proudly.

"It couldn't be better," Betty answered.

Thus the morning slipped away before the girls were aware of its passing, and just as they were ready to go downstairs they heard Aunt Polly calling them to dinner.



18.

THE UNCERTAINTY OF KITES

Before Rosemary and Betty went down to dinner they hid the letter to Claribel in the pocket of Rosemary's blouse.

"What are you girls planning for the afternoon?" Aunt Polly asked.

"We're going up the side of the mountain to help Tad and Hen fly a kite," Rosemary answered with seeming unconcern.

"Fly a kite!" Aunt Polly replied, with a mirthful twinkle in her eye. "Upon my word, but that's a strange kind of game for girls!"

"My Daddy-Doc said he wanted me to take plenty of exercise in the open air, and flying a kite will surely take me out-of-doors."

Aunt Polly's eyes narrowed visibly as she wondered what was the real reason for the kite-flying. The secret weighed so heavily on Rosemary's mind that she managed, only by the greatest effort, to keep smiling. In spite of all she could do, her manner grew more and more nervous.

"Be careful not to go too close to the Old Man of the Mountain," Aunt Polly warned, as the girls left the dining-room and started out through the kitchen.

"We'll be careful," Rosemary assured her, "and don't worry a minute about us."

When the girls went to the tool shed to get the kite, they found Tad waiting for them. He had stolen across the back yards when Tyne and Hen were not watching.

"You're just the person we need to help us fly the kite," began Rosemary.

"That's the reason I came," Tad answered smilingly.

"You carry the kite, and I'll carry the ball of string and this other bundle," Rosemary directed. She was now so excited that she could scarcely wait to get the kite in the air.

"No, I'll carry both the kite and the string," Tad replied. "It will be easier this way. You carry your bundle." Without waiting for further instructions, he started to lead the way.

There was a narrow, winding roadway up the side of the mountain which, in the early days, had been used for carriages. This was now overgrown with weeds and in some places with underbrush, but it still offered the easiest and most direct path. Along this Rosemary raced, while Tad and Betty came panting after her. At one place the road ran directly at right angles to the mountainside, and was for many rods sodded over with timothy grass. Here it was comparatively level, and when she reached this stretch of ground, Rosemary stopped and waited.

"What about beginning the flight here?" she asked, when the other two had caught up with her.

"You can't fly the kite here; the wind's in the wrong direction," Tad explained as best he could between gasps for breath. "Come with me, and go slower," Tad directed, "and I'll show you the right place."

They kept on climbing farther and farther up the mountain. Betty insisted on carrying at least the ball of twine; but Tad was not to be trifled with, for he feared some accident. Once he did stumble over a poplar root and fell heavily forward, but by throwing his arm quickly to one side, he saved the frail kite from instant destruction.

After a time they came to another level stretch in the roadway, and here Tad stopped to announce, "This is the only possible place to get the kite in the air."

Rosemary saw before her a long stretch of even ground and beyond, an abrupt cliff of granite rock. Three or four hundred feet higher towered the castle, which from this spot showed barely the tips of the turrets.

"You hold the ball of string," Tad explained to Rosemary, "and I'll take the kite and climb Old Baldy, the rock here ahead of us. Keep the string tight and unwind the ball just as I need it. When I whistle, you hold the ball in one hand and the string in the other and run down the road like a scared deer."

"Wait a minute," Betty whispered to Rosemary, "you're forgetting to fasten the letter and the bundle of rope."

"Oh, thank you, Betty," Rosemary replied as she drew the letter from her pocket and began tying the letter and the rope to the kite.

"What are you doing?" Tad complained, "Don't you know that the lighter a kite is, the higher she'll fly?"

"This is entirely my business," Rosemary insisted with plenty of self-assurance. "I've paid you for the kite, and you've promised to keep the secret."

"It's hard to keep something when I haven't got it," Tad grinned.

"That's just as it should be, and you're to say nothing at all about what we're doing, do you understand?"

"I'll do anything for you, indeed I will," Tad promised worshipfully.

When the kite was ready, with the bundle of rope and the letter fastened to it, Tad carried it carefully up to the top of Old Baldy, and Rosemary unwound the string as Tad directed. When he whistled, Rosemary ran. But as she ran, she looked back at the kite instead of watching where she was going, and in a moment she had stumbled over a small rock and fallen headlong into a bush.

Betty was watching the kite, too, and did not see Rosemary's plight until too late.

Tad quickly bounded down from Old Baldy and found that the kite, by good fortune, was none the worse for this first catastrophe.

"You shouldn't be so curious," Tad scolded. "Next time look where you're going, and the kite will take care of itself."

When all was ready again, Tad whistled and Rosemary ran. The wind at the moment was perfect, and the kite quickly rose into the air.

Tad raced down and joined Rosemary, and together they let out the string. The kite went higher and higher.

"It surely pulls hard," Rosemary beamed. "The string is beginning to chafe my fingers."

"Here, let me take it," Tad offered willingly.

"Or me," Betty added, trying to be of some help.

"No, thank you," Rosemary answered with determination. "This is my particular job."

Up and up the kite mounted as she released the tugging string.

"It's ever so much higher than the top of the Old Man's head, isn't it?" asked Rosemary, suddenly remembering Claribel.

On the previous flight of the kite, the string had broken and Tad had tied it together carelessly. The three were delightedly watching it soar, when a sudden puff of wind caught the kite and tore the string at this weakened place. Thus released, the kite fluttered first this way and then that, and soon drifted downward.

When she saw the kite lodged in the top of a tall Lombardy poplar, directly in front of the Old Man of the Mountain, Rosemary was in despair. Dashing up the rocks, she grasped the retreating end of the string and tugged hard, trying to free the kite. Instead, she merely implanted it more securely and broke the string, thus leaving her powerless even to get hold of it.

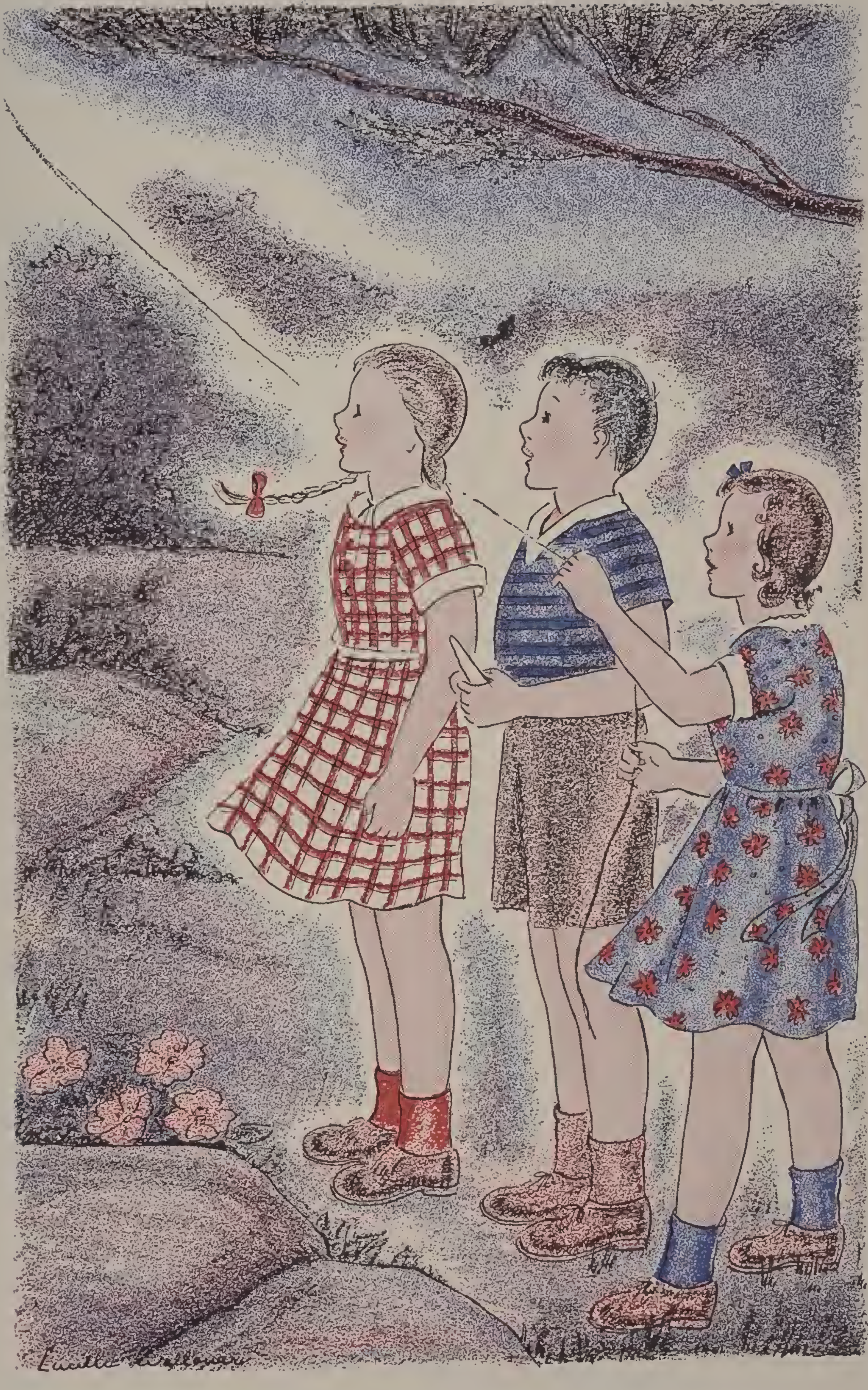
"What can we do now?" Rosemary asked tearfully.

"Nothing more today," Betty answered, "but don't be downcast, we'll think up something we can do tomorrow."

"But can't we do something immediately?" Rosemary persisted.

"We've done plenty for one trip," Tad answered, not a little confused by the entire proceeding. He turned to lead the way down the mountain.

"But we can't leave the kite there," Rosemary insisted


Lucille Wallower

The three were delightedly watching it soar

nervously, "We'll have to climb the tree or something."

"Climb the tree, nonsense!" Tad replied out of patience. "The only thing we can do is to make another kite, and the next time we'll be sure the string is strong enough."

"Oh, but what will Clari—" Rosemary wailed, catching herself just in time before giving away her secret.

"What were you saying about Clara?" Tad asked curiously, and when Betty and Rosemary looked strangely at each other, he added, "Who is this Clara anyway?"

"You promised faithfully, Tad, that you would never tell anyone a single word about what has happened," Rosemary said in a high-pitched, nervous voice. "You know you're going to keep your promise."

"Sure, I'll keep my promise all right. You know I'd do anything in the whole world for you, Rosemary," Tad assured her with a touch of young romance.

"Yes, Tad will keep his word," Betty said quietly, "never worry about that. But hadn't we better be going back down the mountain now before Tyne and Hen find out where we are? They'll be asking awkward questions about what we've been doing."

"You're right," Rosemary smiled. "And thanks, Tad, for helping fly the kite. You've been a good sport about it all."

As they came near Betty's house, each one reviewed silently what had just happened. Rosemary again made Tad promise not to mention the excursion to anyone.

A minute later, as the two girls entered Betty's back yard, they turned to look again at the tragic kite that hung limp and torn in the high branches of the Lombardy poplar. Betty tried to soothe Rosemary's feelings with a bit of homely philosophy that she had often heard her mother express, "Kites are tricky things in the wind."

19.

TYNE INTERRUPTS

When Rosemary and Betty entered the house, tired and discouraged, Aunt Polly commented cheerfully as she looked up from her work: "Well, I hope you've both had your fill of kite-flying."

"We have," Rosemary answered soberly, "at least for today."

"You weren't gone so very long," Aunt Polly continued, looking at them with a quizzical expression.

"When the kite string breaks," Rosemary replied, "and when the kite lodges in the top of the tallest poplar tree in all creation, there isn't much left to do but come home, is there?"

The sorrow and disappointment in Rosemary's voice and face were so unusual that Aunt Polly's mood changed quickly to that of a sympathetic mother.

"I'm sorry that you had bad luck. You'll learn after a while, Rosemary, that most of the kites people fly get lodged somewhere out of reach. It's the way of the world, but you've got to keep looking on the bright side and make the best of it, for that's what the Browns always preach."

"Thank you, Aunt Polly," Rosemary said, almost in tears, "and if you'll excuse us, I think we'll go upstairs and clean up a bit."

When the girls were in Betty's room, Rosemary threw herself across the bed, and said with a sigh of discouragement, "Well, that's that! I wonder what there is left for us to try next?"

"Perhaps we'd better let Nature take her own course this time," Betty suggested, as two large tears welled up in her eyes.

"Aunt Polly is right, we mustn't feel too badly about what has happened, for there wasn't a thing we could have done differently. Kites are uncertain, temperamental creatures, and when they want to lodge in trees, that's exactly what they do, in spite of everything. So there you are, and we couldn't have prevented the calamity, no matter what we had tried."

"I'm glad you feel this way about it," Betty answered, though with a distinct sob. "I did so little; I feel that I should have thought of something more to help."

"Instead of crying over what's already happened, we had better begin planning our next move," Rosemary said as her enthusiasm began to return. "We can never wait for Nature to act, for Claribel has already been imprisoned for years."

"Perhaps the copper box you found contains the solution," Betty suggested, catching Rosemary's rising spirit.

"Why didn't we think of the box before?" Rosemary exclaimed, hurrying across the room to open her trunk. "We've been so excited and busy that we've almost lost our senses, for how else could we have forgotten this copper box!"

Rosemary and Betty carefully examined the way the lid was fastened, but it fitted so perfectly that they weren't exactly sure where the opening was. They turned the box from side to side, and Rosemary tried to pry the lid open, but she nicked her nail file and bent her manicure scissors in the attempt, and all she had to show for her efforts were a number of ugly scratches along the edge of the lid. Finally, out of patience, she placed the box on the floor and stamped on it with her heel, but even this made scarcely a noticeable dent.

"Why not take the box to Tad and Hen and let them open it?" Betty suggested, when every effort had failed.

"But we dare not let anybody know about the box," Rosemary said firmly. "It's a great secret, and if anybody should ever find it out, they would be sure to meddle and spoil our plans. Besides, the box can't help us rescue Claribel Lee, and until she is rescued, I won't be able to think of anything else. In fact, I won't even be able to sleep."

In her puzzled mood, Rosemary naturally went to the window, and next minute she called out excitedly, "Come and look, Betty. You can see the kite in the Lombardy poplar. It's funny that it seems so small; really, it appears no bigger than a postage stamp."

"But I can't see it at all," Betty confessed after straining her eyes.

"It's in the very top of the tallest tree, the one to the right."

"Oh, yes, now I see it," Betty at length exclaimed. "It looks like a white pigeon against the green leaves and the blue sky."

While the girls stood thus gazing and wondering what they should do next, they heard a quick step on the stairs. Rosemary, in her haste to hide the box, dropped it. The box struck the floor on a corner, and the lid, as if by magic, flew open. A packet of papers started to tumble out, but Rosemary pushed them back and thrust the box under her pillow just as the door opened.

"Betty, when are you and Rosemary coming down to help us with our circus?" Tyne questioned, stepping boldly into the room.

"We're very busy just now," Rosemary explained with no show of hospitality.

"I like that!" Tyne bantered. "But you don't look so very busy."

"Well, however idle we seem, we are very, very much engaged!" Rosemary repeated with added emphasis.

Tyne could not take the hint that she was not wanted and, uninvited, sat down on the bed, pointed her toes together, and spoke in loud accents, "You know I've got the slickest trapeze act ready. Really, I can skin the cat better than Tad or Hen or any other boy. And I can do cartwheels just like anything. I know you don't believe me, but it's so!"

"You must be quite a professional to beat Tad," Rosemary commented without interest.

"But even Hen himself says I'm better than Tad! And you know, I think Hen's just a darling. He's always saying something nice about a person. But Tad!" Here Tyne stuck out her tongue to show her dislike. "I wouldn't be seen alone with Tad for a million dollars."

"Tad seems a fine boy to me," Rosemary smiled.

"Huh!" Tyne sniffed in disgust. "You needn't think you're the only pebble on the beach. You think Tad likes you, don't you, now? Even if he did go with you flying a kite this afternoon, he'd turn you down in a minute for Kitty Bentley. She lives down on Lake Avenue. You haven't seen her yet, maybe, but she's the slickest girl ever, or at least Tad seems to think so!"

"You say you're intending to do cartwheels and a trapeze act at the circus?" Rosemary asked, trying to change the topic of conversation.

"Yes, and I suppose you won't even look at my act, at least not if Tad's around."

"Tyne, if we weren't so busy we'd be very glad to visit with you," Betty finally remarked in despair, "but you're only delaying our work."

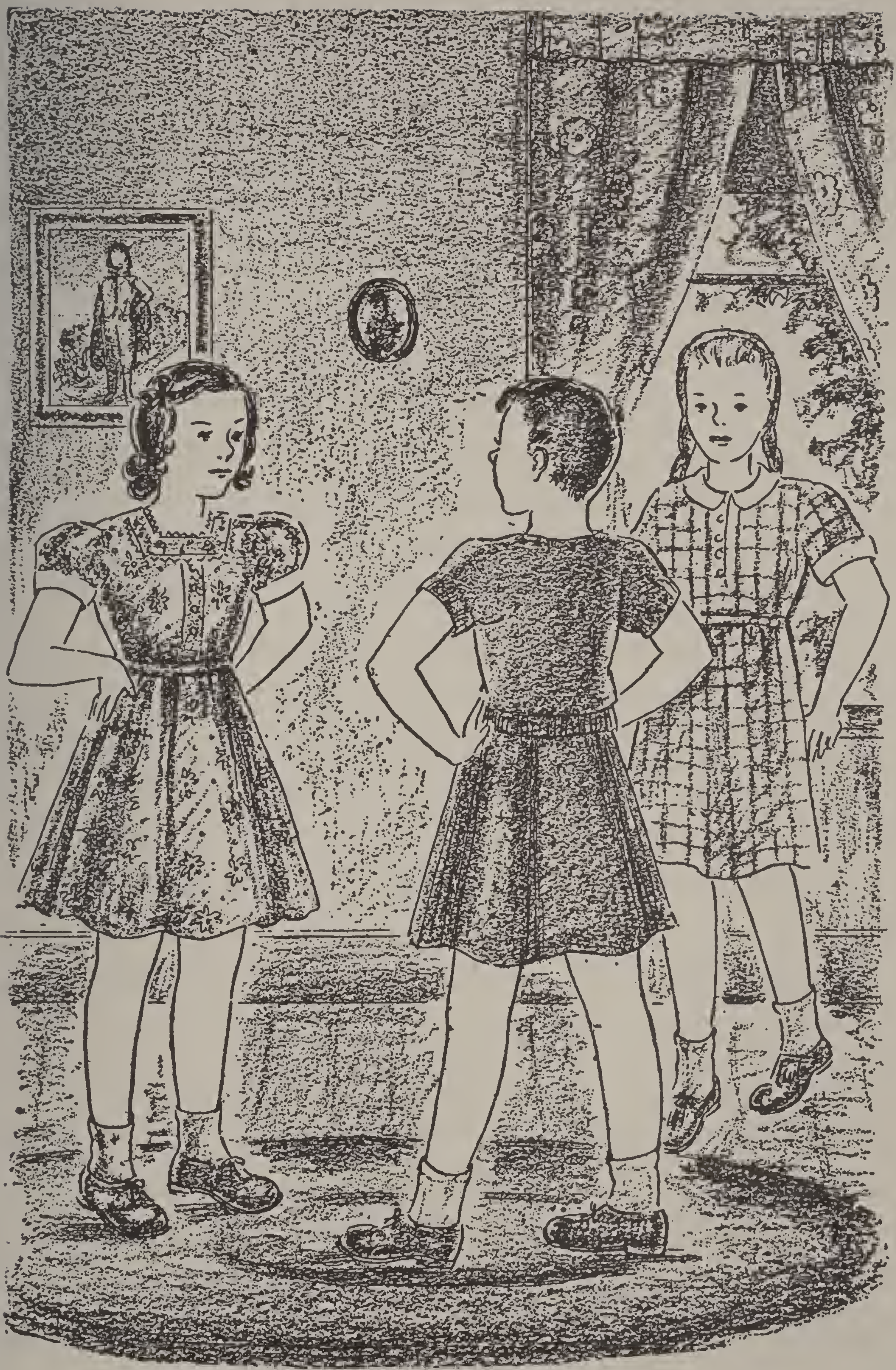
"Well, then why don't you go right ahead with whatever you're doing? I won't bother you any, and I will either talk or keep silent, whichever you want me to do."

"But it's a great secret," Betty explained mysteriously. "Won't you please go, Tyne? Another day, when we aren't doing anything in particular, we'll ask you in to spend the entire afternoon."

"Secret, pooh!" Tyne answered in disgust. "I suppose it's some more nonsense you're hatching up about the Old Man of the Mountain. Tad says you tried to send a rope and a letter up to somebody you call Clara this afternoon by the kite route, but you weren't quite as smart as you thought. Your kite is this minute dangling from one of the poplars."

"Did Tad actually tell you that?" Rosemary gasped as her face went suddenly white.

"No, he didn't actually tell me, but he did tell Hen,



"Won't you please go, Tyne?"

and I overheard everything he said when he didn't know I was listening. You may be from old Chicago, but you aren't half as smart as you think you are!" Tyne grinned in open ridicule.

"Don't be offended, Rosemary," Betty urged, trying to pour oil on the storm-tossed waters. "Tyne may be a bit outspoken, but she has her good points when you come to know her."

Rosemary wouldn't listen; she turned and looked out through the window.

"But I can't go, Betty, till you've seen me do a cartwheel," Tyne continued. Before anybody could stop her, Tyne had stepped to the side of the room, tried first to stand on her hands and then, with a thumpety-thump, threw her feet into the air and crashed against the opposite wall.

"That was pretty fine, wasn't it?" Tyne beamed as she recovered her balance.

"Girls!" shouted Aunt Polly from the kitchen below, "If you want to play games, go out in the back yard before you shake all the plaster off the walls."

"But now that you've seen what I can do, there is no need of my doing the act over again," Tyne added as she sat on the bed again and continued to make herself a general nuisance. "I'm just waiting to see you go ahead with your work. By the way, how much will you give me to climb the poplar and fetch down your letter and your rope?"

"I won't give you anything," Rosemary replied impatiently, without turning from the window.

"Tad and Hen told me how they each gypped you out of two bits when you bought their kite," Tyne continued, trying to be disagreeable. "They would have taken ten cents and have been tickled to death."

Rosemary's face again went white to think how this impossible girl was getting the best of her; but there was nothing she could do without giving a show of bad manners herself. What would have happened next no one could have predicted had not the situation been saved by Aunt Polly's call.

"Hiram's home! Supper's ready! Come down right away!"

Rosemary did not wait for a second invitation but started at once for the dining room. Betty came down the stairs more slowly, and Tyne reluctantly followed.

As Tyne set out for her house, she knew that she had spoiled Rosemary's plans, whatever they were, and she was glad; but she also wondered enviously what the great secret could possibly be.

20.

THE OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN

While they were eating supper, Rosemary was so curious and fidgety that she could scarcely wait while her Uncle Hiram finished his pie and coffee. When he finally pushed his chair back from the table, she asked insistently, "And now you're going to finish the story of what happened after the cook and the business manager were frightened away from the Old Man of the Mountain."

"Not quite so fast, young lady, not so fast," Uncle Hiram replied with a dry smile. "You can't hurry your Uncle Hiram. Eating a square meal is one thing, and telling a long-winded story is a horse of quite a different color."

Rosemary had worked herself into a state of fidgets by the time Uncle Hiram had leisurely walked into the front room. He took his place in his chair, slouched down in an easy position with his legs crossed, and began twiddling his thumbs uncertainly.

Rosemary seated herself as usual directly in front of him, with her chin in her hands, and Betty pulled up another chair as close beside Rosemary as possible. Aunt Polly briskly cleared away the dishes so that she might take up her knitting again and hear every word of the story.

"Well," Uncle Hiram at length began haltingly, "after the cook and the business manager disappeared from the hotel, the place remained empty for a long time, or at least that's what everybody supposed, for no one was brave enough to go near it.

"People began to talk of the hotel as the Old Man of the Mountain, and as the years went on, they spoke of it more and more simply as Mystery Mountain. So this is the name that has clung to it ever since.

"Then one night several months after the cook and the business manager had fled, Pete Delaney and Phil Leckstrum, two of the town toughs, decided that they'd make a night raid on the place and carry away everything valuable they could lay hands on. They each took a deer rifle, and were prepared to shoot any ghost that dared to show as much as a hair of his head.

"But what actually happened leaked out only very gradually afterwards. The two men had climbed cautiously into the lobby through a window, and then had gone through the dining room with their flashlights, and had even ventured into the butler's pantry. They were surprised to find that all the chinaware and the silver had been removed, and that whoever took them had done such a good job that there was nothing left worth carrying away.

"Then when they started down one of the large corridors leading from the dining room to the office, where the safe was still standing, something suddenly happened. Neither one of the men would ever tell exactly what it was. All that the town folks ever knew was that Pete Delaney's hair turned white over night, and that Phil Leckstrum was in bed for several weeks with a bad case of nerves.

"Well, after this occurrence, the imagination of the townspeople was so aroused that every time anyone looked at the Old Man, they saw a cold calculating face, with eyes in an endless stare that bored holes right through them. And by this time all the children in town were afraid to go near the place.

"It wasn't long after this, perhaps six or eight months later, that a man who called himself Craig Harding, Jr., blew into town. He pretended to be the lawful heir to the property and said that he had come to take it over and reopen the hotel.

"Everybody promptly warned him that if he valued his life, it wasn't safe to have anything to do with the place. They filled his ears with everything that had happened; but of course, he was too wise to listen to reason."

At this point Aunt Polly stopped her needles long enough to turn a significant glance in Rosemary's direction.

"Well, this Craig Harding, Jr.," Uncle Hiram continued, "bragged with a boisterous laugh that he'd already met his majesty, the Devil, on three different occasions, and that the Devil had each time chosen to run rather than stand his ground.

"That same afternoon young Harding carried his suitcase up to the hotel himself, for he couldn't find anybody willing to deliver his luggage. As he started up the mountain, he laughed gayly and said he guessed he'd have to do without his trunks until he could hire somebody who wasn't a coward to move into town.

"In order to prove that there weren't any grounds for their fears, he promised to come downtown next morning and report upon his night's adventure.

"The next morning at the appointed time a large crowd gathered to greet him, but young Harding didn't appear. So along late in the afternoon the Chief of Police, accompanied by a dozen citizens with guns, went up the mountain to investigate.

"When they'd gone as far as the steel picket fence, they found Harding lying on the ground with an ugly gash across his cheek. From all the men could observe, they thought that somebody had carried the wounded man out of the hotel and thrown him over the fence.

"The men took Harding, Jr. down to the hospital as fast as they could. Some days later, when he had regained his senses, he said that somebody who was the spitting image of Craig Harding, Sr., had attacked him when he entered the hotel, and that was the last he knew until he had awakened in the hospital.

"This last happening, of course, started the town buzzing again. Some people argued that old Craig Harding himself must be hiding somewhere in the hotel, while others claimed, with equally sound reasoning, that the place was haunted by Craig Harding's ghost. But everybody was too timid to investigate, and so there the matter stopped."

"Aren't you telling too much?" Aunt Polly asked.

"No, I don't think so," Uncle Hiram answered, peevish at having his story hindered. "But there isn't much more to tell," he added, shifting to a more comfortable position in his chair.

"Well, the next event that I recall which brought Mystery Mountain back on the front page of the town's gossip list was the escape of six criminals from the Marquette Branch Prison.

"After the officers had scoured the countryside for a week or ten days, some boys who happened to be playing up on the mountain accidentally discovered that the criminals had taken refuge in the old hotel. They carried the news downtown, and a few hours later a posse of officers and citizenry closed in on the place.

"The criminals, who had a lookout posted, saw the posse coming and tried to escape by the rear entrance, but they were easily captured by the guards who had been posted behind the hotel in the deep pine woods.

"The thing that started a great deal of additional talk was that all the criminals reported they were certain somebody besides themselves was living in the hotel. They had heard strange noises, and they had seen strange sights. Some folks thought there were two ghosts, and others that there was only one person carrying on like a ghost.

"This report started the old argument all over again. One faction of the town maintained that Craig Harding himself was lurking around the hotel, while another faction contended that it was his ghost. They believed that he had been the victim of foul play and that his ghost would continue to talk until the wrong had been righted.

"The last event of any great importance happened some years ago. A young girl by the name of Clara

Bruce was kidnapped in Chicago and was held for a fifty-thousand dollar ransom. Her father was a wealthy business man and paid the ransom, but he was double-crossed and Clara was never returned.

"According to the front page headlines of various newspapers, the young girl and her kidnappers had been trailed to Marquette, but here every trace of Clara Bruce had been lost. A strange woman in black, so the story ran, had brought the child up from Chicago on the Pullman and had gotten off the train here at seven forty-five in the morning. That was the very last trace that anybody ever had of the child.

"The father at first offered a reward of five thousand dollars to anyone who would return his daughter, and later he raised it to ten thousand. He also hired detectives for a number of years until the greater part of his fortune was spent, but so far as I've ever heard, he never found either Clara or the kidnappers.

"Of course the detectives camped around the Old Man of the Mountain at one time or another. They believed they had proof that someone was living in the hotel, and then later they decided that this wasn't true.

"They saw flitting glimpses of what looked like a ghost, and they heard weird, uncanny sounds, but they were never able to prove whether the noises came from the empty creaking building itself or from someone who was hidden within and very much needed help.

"These activities kept Mystery Mountain on the tongues of the local town gossips year in and year out.

"And the more people talked, the more convinced they were that they were individually right in their theory, whatever it might be.

"The outside appearance of the old hotel changed with the passing of the years. It began to take on a bleak, spooky look; and people never went near the building themselves, and they warned their children against going.

"But occasionally, every year or two, somebody's curiosity gets the better of his discretion. Sometimes it's a man and sometimes it's a woman; but whoever it happens to be, the person is sorry ever after."

"Well, Hiram Brown," Aunt Polly interrupted with no uncertain emphasis, "you've already finished your story. Besides it's now seven minutes since the clock struck nine, and so it's time all honest, hard-working people were on their way to bed."

Now that the story was completed, Rosemary's nervous excitement gradually relaxed. "Thank you so much, Uncle Hiram," she smiled, "I know I've caused you a lot of trouble by asking for the story. It was so nice of you to tell it."

"You're entirely welcome," Uncle Hiram smiled in reply, as he turned to make sure that the kitchen door was locked. "And I feel quite repaid, for I know now that you'll never again venture near the Old Man of the Mountain."

"You can trust me, never fear," Rosemary assured him as she turned toward the stairway and said goodnight.

The girls were soon in their room, and Rosemary promptly began, "It's certainly a relief to have the story finished. You can't imagine how hard I've been trying to figure out the solution."

"And I've been trying hard, too," Betty added, "but would you have gone exploring if you had known everything?"

"You never can tell. But if I were sure I could rescue Claribel or Clara, or whoever it is that's imprisoned by those mean old mummies, I'd go up there alone again this minute."

21.

THE SECRET PASSAGEWAY

When the girls had recovered from the excitement of Uncle Hiram's story, Rosemary again thought of the copper box, and brought it out from beneath her pillow.

"Isn't this exciting!" Rosemary whispered with bated breath.

"I'm almost afraid," Betty replied, "to have you open it at all."

"We must banish all fear," Rosemary said with a dramatic sweep of her arm.

The two girls sat close beside each other on the edge of the bed, while Rosemary drew out the packet of papers. Originally the documents had been bound with rubber bands, and they were enclosed in a wrapper of tinfoil as a protection against moisture.

When Rosemary, with trembling fingers, tried to unfold the tinfoil, it crackled and crumbled in a thousand fragments in her lap. Inside there was a covering of oiled paper and this, too, fell to pieces when she undid it.

"This must be something very precious to have such elaborate care bestowed upon it," Rosemary whispered with rising excitement.

"Oh, do be careful," Betty urged as her interest and curiosity became more intense.

By this time both girls were wide-eyed with wonder. Inside there was still a second covering of oiled paper, stiffened and hardened by age, which they were able to unfold without breaking.

The girls were almost breathless with suspense, and their minds were stirred with expectation over what they would find next. Inside this second covering of oiled paper there was another covering of tinfoil, which was still as flexible as the day it had first been placed within the box.

"We're coming to something very important now!" Rosemary whispered.

"I'm sure we are," Betty agreed, "but do be careful."

Inside this second wrapping of tinfoil there was an additional covering of delicate tissue paper, which Rosemary carefully took off, certain now that she was at last coming to the heart of the great mystery.

There proved to be two separate packages, each with a final inner wrapping of tissue paper. Rosemary opened the smaller one first, and a tintype likeness of a man, as clear as the day it was taken, looked out at her with mysterious eyes. An engraved calling card bearing the name Craig Harding, fell into her lap.

"So this is you, Craig Harding, at last!" Rosemary exclaimed. "How do you do, my good man!"

"I knew it was going to turn out to be something wonderful," Betty said confidently.

"And now, Betty, we shall see what's inside this other package."

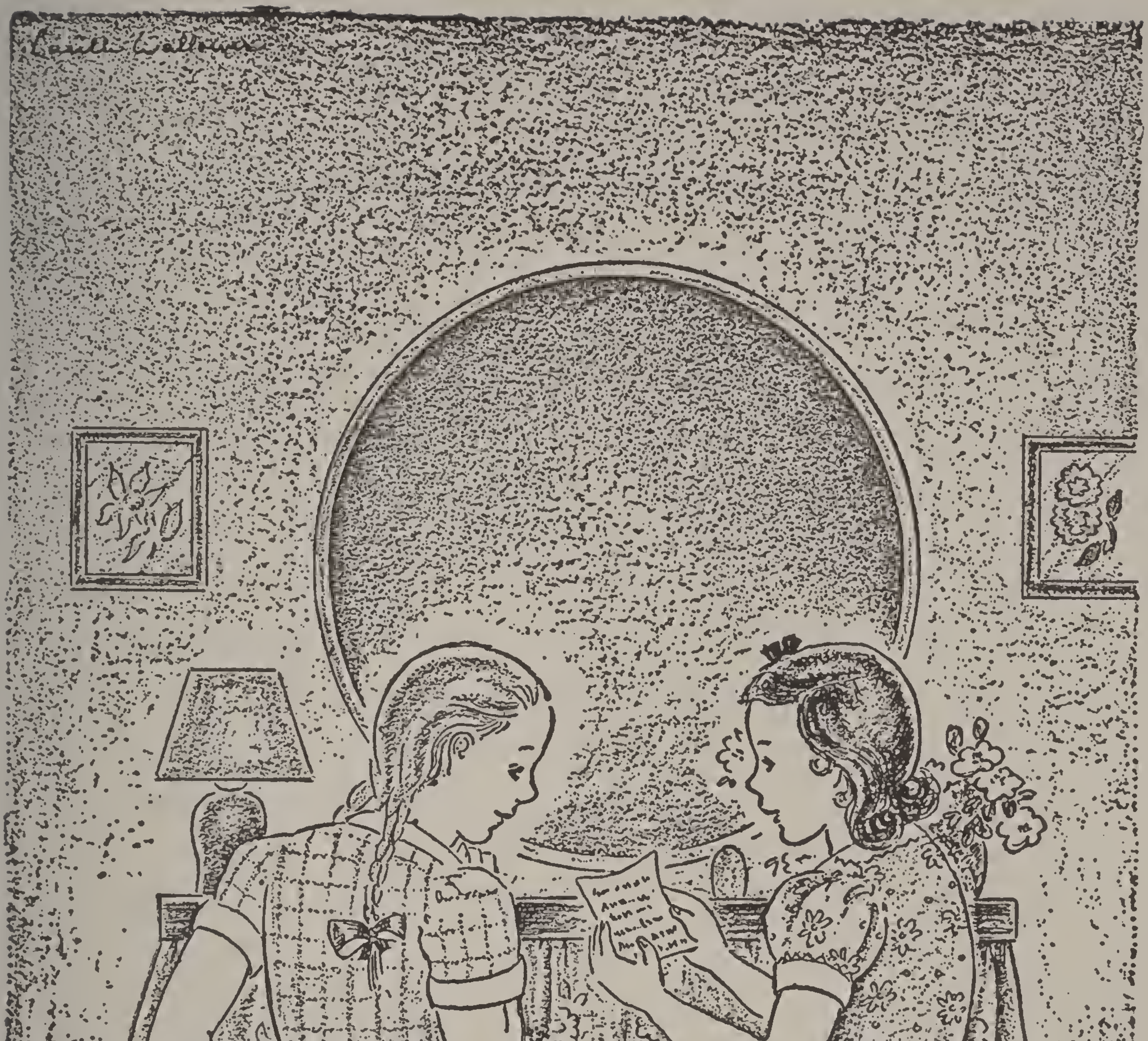
The second package proved to be a document written in a distinguished, though nervous hand. The paper seemed strangely like the crisscross chicken tracks in Tad and Hen's back yard. After concentrating on it for quite a while, Rosemary began to read in a subdued whisper:

> To the World at Large:
>
> When this record is finally found, I, Craig Harding, shall long since have passed to my eternal reward. This document, in that distant day, may prove of some small value in clearing up what is sure to become one of the greatest of mysteries.

"I knew it!" Betty exclaimed with awed quiet, "I knew it!"

"Don't interrupt," Rosemary answered, reading on:

> Within my hotel, I have had constructed a secret passageway leading by a hidden staircase to an underground vault.



Rosemary began to read in a subdued whisper

"It's getting creepy and spooky!" Betty whispered.

"It's perfectly wonderful, you mean!" Rosemary replied.

This secret passageway I planned for my own protection. During my earlier years, be it here known, I lived in the Kentucky mountains. It was only natural that I should be drawn into the feudal warfare of that country, and on one occasion I led an attack and killed an enemy, Thomas Duckworth by name. The two of us had become personally incensed over the love of the same girl. Alas! I cannot bear to write her name! The scar across my cheek, the mark of Thomas Duckworth's last bullet, I will carry to my dying day.

The dead man's clansmen swore immediate vengeance on me, and vowed never to relax their efforts until they had taken me.

I fled, disguised as a woman, and by sheer good luck reached Cincinnati, and hastily lost myself in the crowd. However, I could not remain there, for my pursuers combed the city.

Again I disguised myself, this time as a lame city-bred youth, and fled to Chicago. Here I lived for eight years, but not without a constant haunting fear, for I knew that my enemies would never give up their search. I changed my name to Craig Harding, though my rightful name is Wolfe Barclay.

There was for me no peace; my days were passed in dread and my nights in sleepless vigil. I knew that someone was always searching for me, and that surely they must find my trail, and I was always laboring to throw them off my track.

When I happened to fall asleep, I would awaken in the middle of the night. I had ever the premonition that my end was very near, and around every corner I always expected to meet one of my pursuers.

It was this ceaseless nervous strain that finally undermined my health and led to my first coming to Marquette, Michigan.

"It's a sad story," Betty interrupted. "Don't you pity Craig Harding?"

"Yes, in a way," Rosemary answered, "but it all happened many years ago, and what's past can't make one feel too sad."

When I had the hotel built, I made sure that two parallel foundation walls of Lake Superior granite were constructed across the entire front of the basement. These walls were each two feet thick, and there was a space of eight feet between them.

The architect thought me a fool to waste money so lavishly, but I gave him and everybody else to understand that I meant to build a secure foundation for all time to come; and that since I was paying the bills, I should have the right to say how I wished the walls constructed.

After the building was completed—except for the inside finishing work—I hired a master carpenter from Chicago and brought him to the hotel in secrecy. I instructed him to construct a hidden entrance to this vault between the granite walls. This he did in utmost privacy, and worked only when the other laborers were away from the building.

When this master carpenter had finished, all I had to do was to press a hidden button on the wall inside a clothes closet at the left of the fireplace. When the button was pressed, a section of the solid wall opened as if by magic, and this led to a hidden stairs, and these to the concealed vault.

The workmanship was so perfect that no sign of the hidden passageway was visible from the outside, and there was no possible way to open the concealed door except by pressing the button.

"Isn't this the most thrilling mystery you ever read?" Rosemary grinned.

"Yes, and weird!" Betty murmured.

Later I hired a master stonemason to come secretly from Chicago to construct a series of stone-faced swinging doors. These were made so that each one shut off a small chamber within the main vault, and when they were closed, they were so perfectly fitted that they gave the appearance of solid masonry.

These doors made it possible for me—should it ever become necessary—to hide myself or others from human pursuit. It may seem strange to you, reader, that I should be here detailing these secrets, but this document is intended as an aid in unravelling what will doubtless become an unsolved mystery. My hope lies in the fact that when this document is discovered I shall long since have passed beyond.

"It's really spooky," Betty whispered as she took hold of Rosemary's arm.

"But it will help to clear up the mystery," Rosemary whispered in high excitement.

And now a final word to the reader who years hence discovers this document: Be of a forgiving spirit. For know that the writer of these words did all that he did in self-defense, to protect himself from his enemies. He was the victim of an old Kentucky family feud.

Signed: Wolfe Barclay
alias Craig Harding

"Is that all?" Betty asked in suspense.

"That's everything," Rosemary answered, "and it explains the entire mystery."

"But it doesn't say anything about Claribel Lee," Betty corrected, getting up from the bed and sitting down in a chair opposite Rosemary.

"Of course not," Rosemary answered. "You see this document was written years before Claribel was kidnapped. And this kidnapping must have been the result of Craig Harding's extreme poverty, for you see he couldn't earn an honest living for fear of being caught by his enemies."

"You may be right," Betty assented. "And do you suppose Claribel is being held a prisoner in the hidden vault?"

"Only when danger threatens," Rosemary answered, using her imagination. "At other times she is probably locked in one of the high turrets."

"But there isn't anything further we can do now except to tell everything to Dad," Betty interrupted.

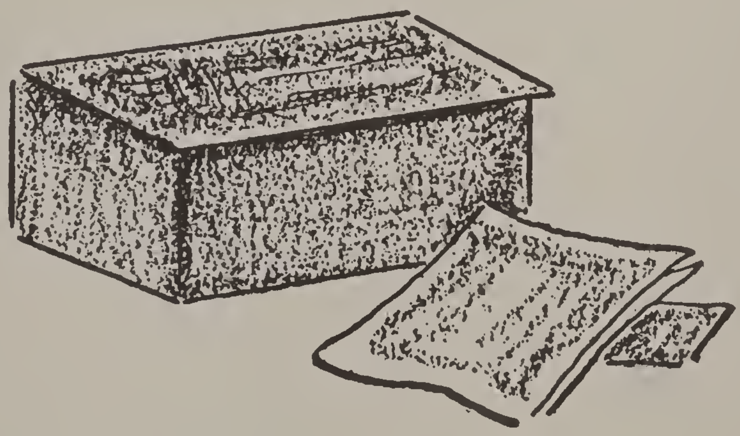
"Yes, tomorrow evening as soon as he comes home from work, we'll tell him *our* story, and he can help us rescue Claribel."

"We must go to bed now," Betty suggested. "There are heaps of things to be done before we can rescue Claribel, and we will need clear heads in the morning."

"And to think," Rosemary continued, entirely ignoring Betty's counsel, "that we are in possession of one of the greatest mysteries of all time. How can we hope to sleep until we have at least planned Claribel's rescue!"

"But we can talk more quietly in bed," Betty added, putting on her pajamas.

"I'm going to sit down before the window for a few minutes first and look out at the Old Man of the Mountain," Rosemary answered. "I'll be seeing you in the morning. Good night."



22.

MORE EXCITING NEWS

When Rosemary came away from the window and slipped into bed, she found that Betty, too, was so excited that she couldn't sleep. The two girls lay awake and whispered until after midnight, and as a result they both overslept the next morning. They were awakened when Aunt Polly opened their door and came into the room.

"Rosemary!" she called. "Here's another telegram! This time somebody must at least be very sick!"

Rosemary sat up in bed and read the message.

> WILL ARRIVE AT MARQUETTE SUNDAY MORNING BY PLANE STOP DON'T VISIT THE OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN AGAIN UNTIL I ARRIVE STOP LOVE
>
> Dad

"Hooray! Daddy-Doc is coming!" she shouted. Leaping out of bed she threw her arms about Aunt Polly's neck and gave her a dozen kisses. Then she danced back and forth across the room shouting, "Hooray! Just think, tomorrow morning! It doesn't seem possible!"

Aunt Polly was already beginning to plan the meals for Rosemary's father.

"You girls get dressed right away," she said. "You'll have to run an errand at the store. I've got to do a lot of baking, for there's not a blessed thing in the house for Sunday dinner!"

Quieting herself somewhat, Rosemary exclaimed, "Aunt Polly, you don't know my Daddy-Doc, or you wouldn't say anything about cooking a Sunday dinner."

"Don't I remember how much Uncle Will can eat!" Aunt Polly grinned. "Why, he's hollow all the way down to his heels!"

"But what I mean, Aunt Polly, is that he'll take us all down town to the hotel for dinner, so you mustn't get excited about what we're going to have to eat!"

"I never saw such a child as you are, Rosemary, in all my born days," Aunt Polly laughed. "But I'll have to be prepared for the worst. You never can tell about these men; they're likely to want to eat any minute. Your Daddy-Doc will be hungry for a taste of home cooking, that I know, for he's always been powerfully prejudiced in favor of my cherry pie."

"The Daddy-Doc I know," Rosemary insisted as she finished dressing, "is always making strange faces when he hears anybody talk about things 'as good as mother used to make.' He says he would a thousand times rather eat at the hotel than at home; and since I haven't eaten anywhere in Marquette except here with you, I'm sure he'll want to take us all to the hotel for our Sunday dinner."

"Time alone will tell," Aunt Polly replied with wisdom, "but if I don't get something in my pantry, I'm sure to be flooded with company!"

Aunt Polly returned to the kitchen, and Rosemary and Betty quickly followed her, excited over what the new day would bring forth. On their way to the store a few minutes later, they were delayed by Tad and Hen and Tyne.

"When are we going to hold the circus?" Tyne called.

"We can't possibly have it before some time next week," Betty announced importantly. "Rosemary's just had another telegram from her father, and he's arriving by plane tomorrow morning. And we're all going to have dinner at the hotel, and everything! Isn't it exciting!"

"And you see," Rosemary laughed, "Betty and I are on our way to the store to buy a lot of food for tomorrow. If all turns out as we expect, we'll have our circus the first thing next Monday afternoon. What do you say to three o'clock for our opening curtain?"

"That will be just fine," Tad shouted happily.

"Are we going to invite the whole town? And how much are we going to charge?" Hen asked eagerly.

"Let's have everybody," Tyne said gaily. "Our mothers'll like it best of all."

"But you don't mean to have grown-up people?" Rosemary gasped, unable to imagine a group of mature women attending so childish a performance.

"Of course we are," Tyne asserted, anxious for an argument.

"Sure," chimed in Hen.

"Why not?" queried Tad.

"It's the usual thing," added Betty.

And thus it was decided.

"Have you thought about your act yet, Betty?" Tad asked with a critical gaze.

"I've been too busy to think of anything," Betty answered, as she pulled Rosemary's sleeve and suggested that they go on to the store.

"Busy! Snap out of it!" Tyne added with emphasis.

"But when you've got to entertain your cousin," Betty's chin lifted high in pride, "and help send telegrams and all—"

"You might put on a magician act or something," Tad suggested.

"I'll do some sleight-of-hand," Betty promised, as she and Rosemary turned to go. "Yes, and I'll put on an animal act with Snooks dressed as a tiger."

"And I'll do a tightrope stunt besides my dancing act," Rosemary added. "But we must dash down to the store now."

"Sorry you haven't time to practice," Tad called in a tone of disappointment.

Rosemary threw him a lighthearted smile in reply. As she and Betty hurried on their way, Rosemary began eagerly, "Do you realize, Betty, what a lot of things we still have left to decide? Do you realize," she repeated, as she stopped and turned around to look at the Old Man of the Mountain, "that we are the only two persons in all the world who know the real mystery? And now that Mystery Mountain has given up its secret, it doesn't seem nearly so weird as it did before."

"It seems a lot more spooky to me," Betty replied in a trembling voice. "Only think how unbearable it must be for Claribel Lee to have been a prisoner for so many years. Perhaps she is still being held for ransom by those old mummies. It upsets me every time I think of her." As she spoke large tears welled up in her eyes.

"Yes, we must rescue Claribel as soon as ever we can. Oh, I only hope she is safe and well," Rosemary said hopefully.

"Heavens! Rosemary, Mother told us to hurry! And here we are idling along as though we had all day."

"But we've work to do that is much more important than helping with a Sunday dinner," Rosemary asserted with a gesture of self-importance. "We must plan some method for making our secret known, for we can't accomplish anything without first getting the right people interested."

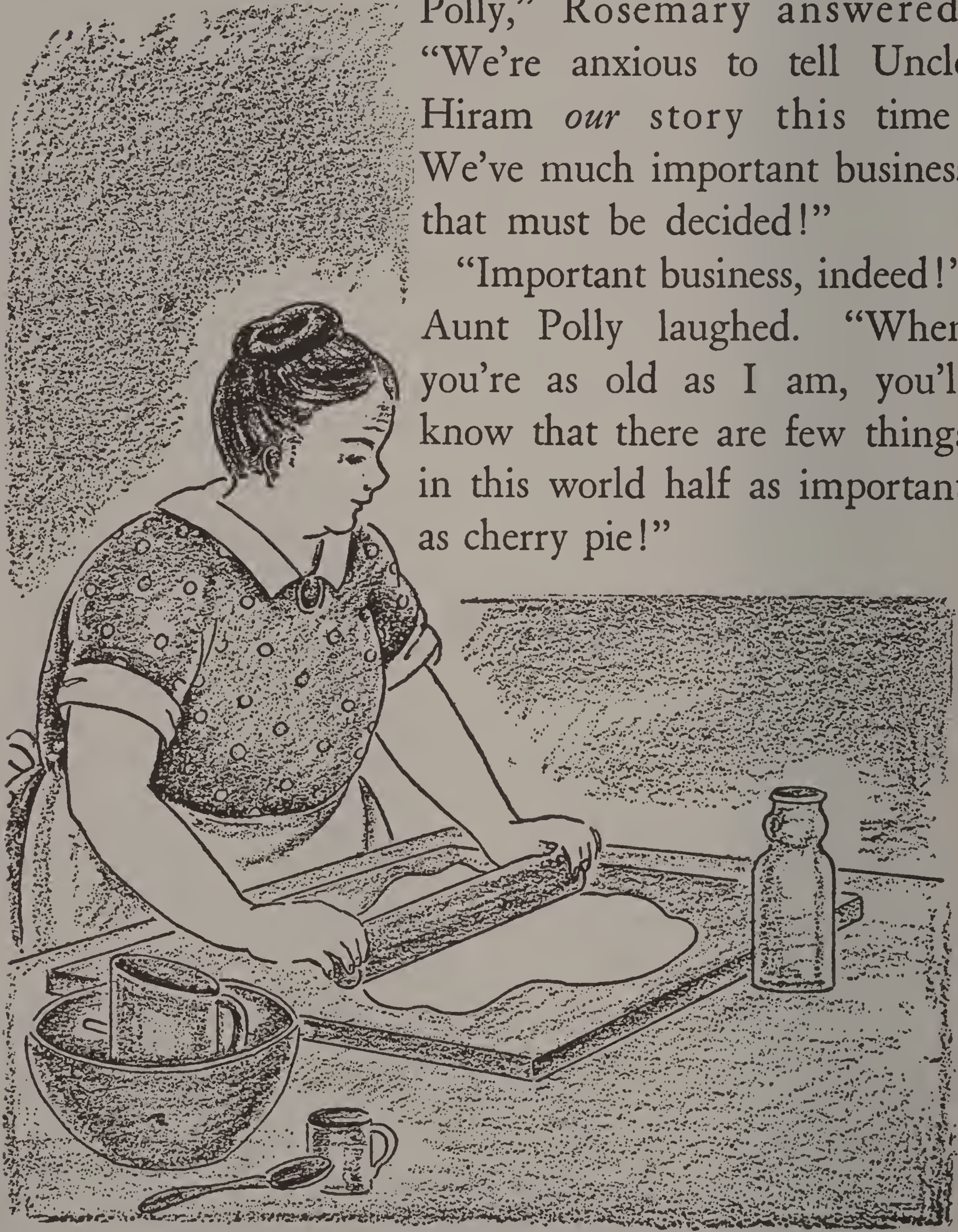
"We'll tell Dad first, as soon as he gets home from work," Betty suggested. "He'll be able to call the police, and they'll make an investigation."

"You're right, Betty," Rosemary agreed. "Uncle Hiram must have the information first. There must be more than ghosts living at the Old Man of the Mountain, whose capture will lead to a rich reward. And tomorrow when Daddy-Doc arrives, he'll help, too, for he's not afraid of smallpox or flu or diphtheria, and I know he wouldn't let anything like a mystery scare him. The Old Man of the Mountain," Rosemary laughed, "will have the surprise of his life tomorrow, or I miss my guess. And when we've brought Claribel out of hiding, we'll be celebrated detectives with our names in all the newspaper headlines." As she walked along, she thought happily of the importance that would soon be theirs.

When the girls finally arrived at Aunt Polly's kitchen, laden with parcels from the grocery, they were greeted with her dry humor, "My goodness! If ever there was a pair of snails! Two girls are worse than half a girl when it comes to doing errands! Here it is nearly noon, and all my baking yet to do."

"We'll explain everything, if you give us time, Aunt Polly," Rosemary answered. "We're anxious to tell Uncle Hiram *our* story this time! We've much important business that must be decided!"

"Important business, indeed!" Aunt Polly laughed. "When you're as old as I am, you'll know that there are few things in this world half as important as cherry pie!"



23.

THE SECRET WILL OUT

Rosemary and Betty could scarcely wait for Uncle Hiram to come home from work. They had so many things to tell him and so many plans to discuss. After he did finally arrive, they were impatient to get through with supper.

While Uncle Hiram was finishing his last cup of coffee, Rosemary excused herself and went upstairs. She soon reappeared with the copper box and Craig Harding's mysterious document.

"Here's a very odd box, Uncle Hiram," Rosemary began abruptly, as she handed it to him.

"Something Uncle Will's sent me?" he asked, as his face brightened with expectancy. "He usually waits till my birthday."

"No, Daddy-Doc doesn't know anything about this box, and it isn't a present. You remember the day I ran away and visited the Old Man of the Mountain, and Aunt Polly thought I was lost? Well, I found this box while I was making my investigation. You see a bolt of lightning had struck and overturned the monument that bore the bronze inscription you described. This box had been placed in the base of the monument that had been torn open by lightning. I simply pulled it out of the opening and brought it home, and here it is."

"You don't mean it!" Uncle Hiram exclaimed in surprise, as he began to scrutinize the box. "You know I always sort of figured there must be some documents hidden away inside that monument."

"I know you did," Rosemary replied, "and here are the documents, too. When Betty and I first opened the box, we found these wrapped in two thicknesses of tinfoil and two of oiled paper. You'll find that this explains all about a hidden stairway and a concealed vault!"

"Where are my specks, Mother?" Uncle Hiram asked, fumbling at the box and the papers. "Betty, hurry and bring them to me!" He was as curious and excited as a ten-year-old child.

Putting his spectacles on with a quick jerk, Uncle Hiram unfolded the document and began to read.

"Hiram Brown! Read it aloud!" Aunt Polly insisted as she looked over his shoulder. "I want to hear it."

Uncle Hiram obediently began at the beginning, and read in a slow, labored voice. He had scarcely finished when Aunt Polly again asserted herself.

"Hiram Brown, you've got to take that box and that document and this picture of Craig Harding down to the Chief of Police this minute. Upon my word, it will help to solve a mystery that's baffled the whole nation for years!"

"Do you think I'd better go tonight?" Uncle Hiram faltered.

"Of course you must! And at once!" Aunt Polly insisted with conviction. "There's no other way out."

"Just a minute," Rosemary interrupted. "There's still more to be told. On the same visit to the Old Man of the Mountain, I heard the wail of a girl's voice from the tower, and this letter fluttered down out of the sky and landed directly in front of me."

Uncle Hiram raised his spectacles to his forehead and looked at Rosemary with added surprise as she handed him the letter.

"Isn't it a shame to think that Claribel is still a prisoner?" Betty wailed.

"You've got to go to the Chief of Police without waiting another second!" Aunt Polly urged. "You've got to help organize a posse of men to make a raid on the Old Man of the Mountain and rescue that poor imprisoned girl."

"That's what Betty and I thought should be done," Rosemary agreed. "The raiding party should be organized as soon as Daddy-Doc arrives tomorrow morning."

"Well, upon my word!" Aunt Polly exclaimed with sudden understanding. "So this is the very important business you've been constantly talking about!"

"Betty and I told you we would explain everything when the time came," Rosemary replied.

"But why did you fly that kite you told me about?"

"You will never make a Pinkerton detective," Betty laughed.

"We tied a bundle of rope to it so that Claribel could use the rope for a ladder in making her escape," Rosemary explained. "But the old kite had to go and get itself caught in the very top of a Lombardy poplar tree. You see, Aunt Polly, we've had a good reason for everything we've done."

"You still think I had better take these things to the Chief of Police tonight?" Uncle Hiram asked.

"Absolutely, yes!" Aunt Polly exclaimed.

"You will have to take Betty and me with you," Rosemary reminded him.

"We are the star witnesses, and you can't leave us out," Betty added with eyes sparkling.

"The girls are right," Aunt Polly agreed, "and if I weren't so slow and poky, I'd go with you too!"

"Uncle Hiram, we haven't a minute to waste," Rosemary urged, starting toward the door.

"I'll be right with you in a second!"

A quarter of an hour later, the three were hurrying down town through the twilight. In their excitement Rosemary and Betty were a dozen paces ahead of Uncle Hiram, who was hustling as fast as he possibly could.

"Don't you think," Rosemary called over her shoulder, "that we're pretty good detectives?"

"Fact is," Uncle Hiram answered proudly, "you've got Sherlock Holmes beat a thousand miles."

"And we're surely glad you're helping us," Betty added, as she waited for her father to catch up.

When they reached the corner of Front and Washington Streets they came unexpectedly upon the Chief of Police himself. He was a lank, raw-boned giant, with beetling brows and immobile face. Rosemary and Betty glanced up at him, thinking he might be rather nice if he didn't scowl so severely and if the gun on his hip didn't look so menacing.

Uncle Hiram called him aside and talked for a few minutes in a low voice. At length the big Chief nodded his head significantly and started with a long, rolling stride in the direction of the City Hall. Uncle Hiram walked at his side, while Rosemary and Betty followed close behind.

When they were inside his private office, the big Chief slid down into a swivel chair behind a greasy, flat-topped oak desk, and motioned his visitors into chairs facing him. After he had deliberately lighted a cigar, he said curtly as though time were precious and must not be wasted, "Well, shoot the works."

"This, Chief, is my niece, Rosemary Brown from Chicago," Uncle Hiram began proudly, "and this is my daughter, Betty. Both girls are naturally inquisitive, like all healthy youngsters."

"Yes, of course," nodded the Chief, somewhat bored.

"But here's the point," Uncle Hiram hurried on, "Rosemary and Betty became so curious about the Old Man of the Mountain that Rosemary ran off alone one morning, unknown to the rest of us, and made an investigation of her own. You see I'd told her all about the granite monument with the bronze inscription that Craig Harding had placed in front of the hotel years ago, and she wanted to check up on me."

"You don't say," the big Chief commented with a slight show of interest.

"Yes, and strange to relate, a bolt of lightning had toppled the monument off its base and exposed this copper box, which Rosemary picked up and brought back to the house with her." Uncle Hiram got up stiffly from his chair and handed the box to the Chief.

"You don't say," the Chief again commented, his face at last beginning to register real attention.

"And inside the copper box was this document, which describes in detail a hidden stairway and a concealed vault between the stone walls of the basement of the old hotel. Evidently this document was written in the neighborhood of twenty-five years ago, just after the Old Man of the Mountain was built."

"Just wait a minute till I take a look at it," the Chief said, puffing his cigar nervously as he read. When he had finished, he asked in a cold, skeptical voice, "But you don't mean to say, Miss Rosemary Brown, that you took this box from the inside of the monument yourself?"

"That's right, Mr. Chief," Rosemary answered quickly. "You can see for yourself the engraving of the hotel on the lid."

The Chief examined the upper surface of the box under a magnifying glass, and then put a drop of liquid on a splotch of ink on the first page of the document to test its age.

"Yes, and this is not all, Mr. Chief," Rosemary continued nervously. "There are people living at the Old Man of the Mountain this very minute. I saw them returning one morning before daylight, after they had been out stealing things to eat—chickens and vegetables. And besides, there's a girl imprisoned there by the name of Claribel Lee, and we also have a letter that she wrote."

Rosemary was chattering so fast that the Chief didn't have time to comprehend half that she said.

"Here's the letter she refers to," Uncle Hiram added, handing it to the Chief.

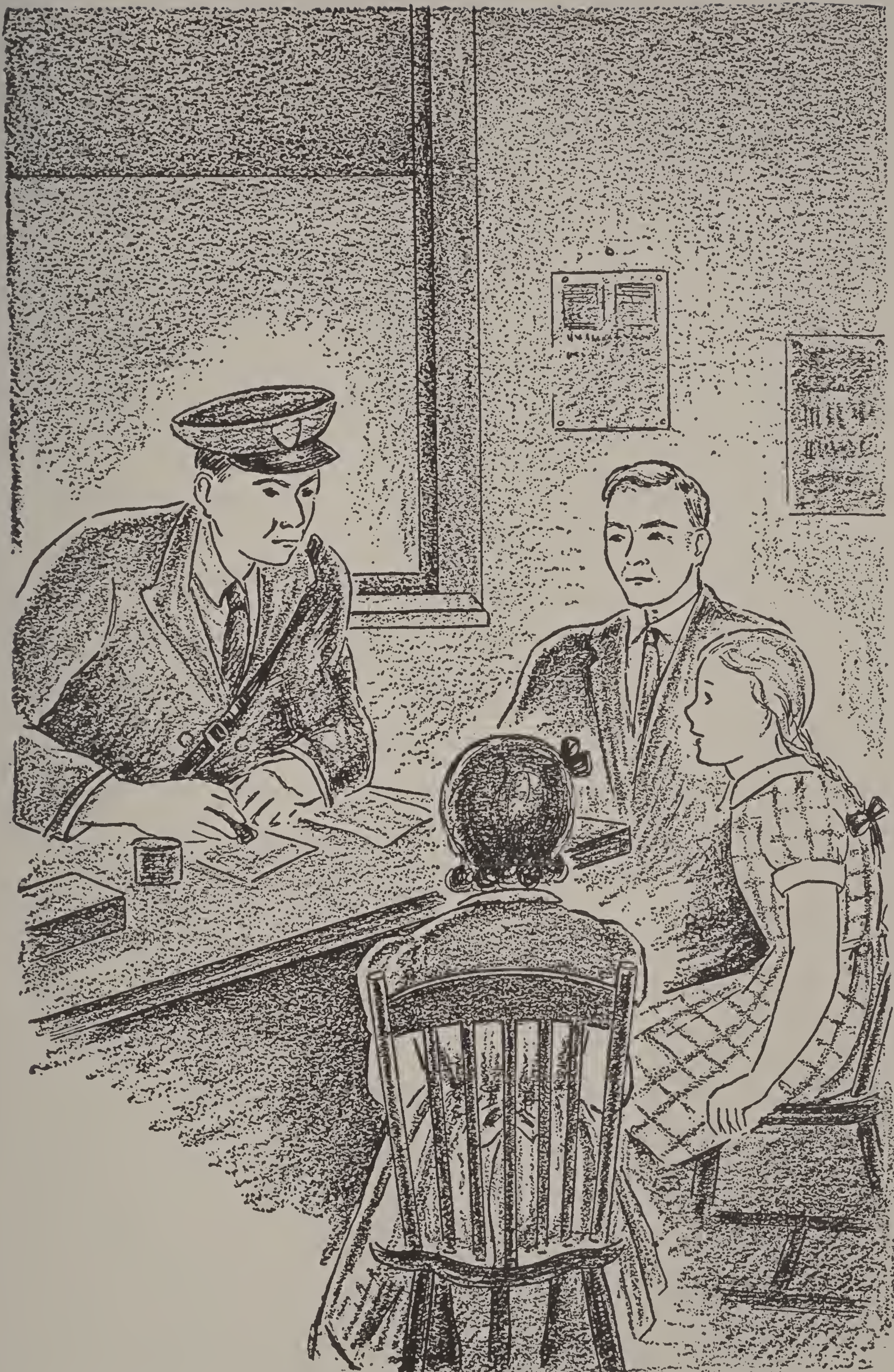
When the Chief had finished reading Claribel Lee's letter, he addressed Uncle Hiram. "Are you certain, Mr. Brown, that these documents are genuine?"

"I don't know any more about them than you do, Chief," Uncle Hiram answered honestly. "The most I know is that Rosemary says she found them. My wife says the girls have been acting strangely, and these seem to explain everything that's been going on since Rosemary arrived at our house for a visit a few days ago."

"I absolutely know they're genuine," Betty stated with a natural calmness that impressed the Chief.

"Were you along when Rosemary found the box?" the Chief questioned her coldly.

"No I wasn't along that minute," Betty answered with outspoken honesty, "but I do know that Rosemary visited the Old Man of the Mountain, for Tad and Tyne and Hen saw her while she was returning. They were up the side of the mountain that morning experimenting with a model airplane. And besides, Rosemary doesn't tell lies, and I helped her open the box and take out the papers. They were wrapped with tinfoil and oiled paper that crumbled when we removed it."



"I absolutely know they're genuine," Betty stated

"But Mr. Chief, I don't see why you doubt us."

"It's my business," the Chief commented rather sternly, "to find out the truth."

"If you wish," Rosemary continued eagerly, "I can describe every detail of my discovery of the box. As I was returning to Betty's house with it under my arm, I met Tyne and Tad and Hen unexpectedly, and I hid the box under a mullen stalk so they wouldn't find out about it. Two days later I went back to find the box very early in the morning, just as it was getting daylight. That was when I saw the old man and woman who are holding Claribel Lee a prisoner. They were sneaking back to their hiding place, and they stopped for a minute near where I hid myself, and I heard them talk and also heard the squawking hen they had stolen."

"It sounds too much like an old-fashioned melodrama to be true," the Chief commented.

"Nevertheless, Chief," explained Uncle Hiram, "we've come to ask if you'll organize a posse of men and make a raid on the Old Man of the Mountain."

Before the Chief could reply, Rosemary added, "Tomorrow morning my Daddy-Doc is arriving from Chicago by plane. I hope you'll wait until he comes, for he can help us a lot. He's not afraid of anybody or anything; why, he's not even afraid of smallpox, flu, or diphtheria, so please wait for him."

This so amused the Chief that he laughed aloud, but Rosemary's request came nearer convincing him of her truthfulness than anything else she had said. He swung partly around in his chair and asked, "And have you young ladies anything further to offer?"

"I have," Uncle Hiram interrupted. "We think you should raid the place tomorrow morning. You can station the men on all sides of the building to cut off every possible means of escape. You can enter the hotel, press the magic button, and before anybody knows what's happening, you can handcuff the old man and woman and rescue Claribel."

"And likely enough," Betty added, "somebody'll get ten thousand dollars reward for finding Claribel."

The Chief leaned forward as he brought his fist down on the dusty desk. "It's just barely possible that you have something here. There have been many strange things going on around this town for years that no one has ever been able to explain, and who knows, this may be the solution. Anyway, we'll investigate tomorrow morning, and with the aid of as brave a man as your Daddy-Doc, as you call him, we shouldn't have any trouble capturing everything in sight."

"You'll find that Rosemary and Betty are a better pair of detectives than Sherlock Holmes," Uncle Hiram bragged with a dry humor.

"Well, if we capture the old man and woman and rescue Claribel tomorrow, I'll agree with you," the Chief smiled as they started. "But remember one thing, and this is most important: You are not to mention a word of this to any living being. Do you understand?"

"Betty and I will cross our hearts to keep the secret. We've already kept it for nearly a week," Rosemary assured him.

"Very well, good evening to you," the Chief concluded as he arose from his chair and showed his visitors to the door.

On the way back up the mountainside, Uncle Hiram, Betty, and Rosemary were much too excited for conversation.

24.

DADDY-DOC ARRIVES

When Sunday morning came, Rosemary and Betty were up with the birds. They had been so thrilled that neither had slept more than a few winks during the night.

"It doesn't seem possible that Daddy-Doc is arriving this morning," Rosemary exclaimed, hopping out of bed.

"But keep your mind on the raid that's to be made on the Old Man of the Mountain," Betty reminded her.

"Of course, but why worry about that? The Chief will organize the raiding party, and if he doesn't, my Daddy-Doc will," Rosemary stated confidently, as she hurriedly dressed herself. "You know, it seems a year since I left Chicago, and it will be so wonderful to have my Daddy-Doc here."

Downstairs Uncle Hiram and Aunt Polly were hard at work. Uncle Hiram was changing the position of the heavy sideboard three-eighths of an inch to satisfy Aunt Polly's capricious taste. He was chasing every suggestion of a cobweb from all sorts of inaccessible places. Even if Aunt Polly's eyesight was poor, she did have a most tantalizing imagination. Uncle Hiram's knees fairly creaked as he clambered up and down on the unsteady kitchen stool.

"I figure it's time to stop this silly nonsense and eat breakfast," Uncle Hiram suggested from his swaying support, as he moved the covered broom this way and that, in futile pursuit of dust and cobwebs.

"Attend to business, Hiram Brown," Aunt Polly replied briskly. "We've only begun. Do you suppose I want your brother to come here and criticize my housekeeping? Well, I guess not!" Aunt Polly punctuated her remarks with a wide grin. "See, Hiram, you've missed that cobweb there over that center Wedgwood plate. How like a man! Why, you can't even see a cobweb when the end of it is tickling your very nose."

"There's no cobweb there, Poll," Uncle Hiram complained. "You imagine cobwebs in the coffee pot!"

"Hiram Brown, quit your trifling! You've got to finish this dusting even if you have to work after Will arrives. And you won't get a bite of breakfast, either, till you're through! So there!"

When Betty and Rosemary came dashing down the stairs, they found Uncle Hiram still chasing the will-o'-wisp cobwebs of Aunt Polly's imagining.

Rosemary was so surprised at finding Uncle Hiram poking about with the broom, that she asked quickly, "Why, Aunt Polly! Aren't we going to have breakfast before Daddy-Doc arrives? It's now nearly seven o'clock."

"Your Aunt Polly's got another one of her cleaning-up spells," Uncle Hiram said in despair, "and there's no knowing how long it will last."

"Oh, Hiram, hush!" Aunt Polly said with a broad grin. "You know yourself that I'm entirely too rheumatic to climb to the top of that stool, and you know that you like to have things clean as well as anybody."

" 'Cleanliness is next to godliness,' " Daddy-Doc always says," Rosemary chattered. "But he won't find anything to complain about in this house. I believe you would turn over every board in the kitchen floor, if you could, and scrub the under side."

"You're right, Rosemary," Uncle Hiram commented with a wry smile as he climbed down from the stool, "your Aunt Polly'd turn everything wrong side out if things weren't nailed down. But thank goodness, the wainscoting and the walls are up to stay!"

As soon as the girls had finished their hurried breakfast, they went out on the porch to listen for the expected arrival of the airplane. Tyne and Tad and Hen saw them and came over to learn the latest news.

"So your Dad's coming!" Tyne began in a loud voice. "Hope you're glad to see your ol' man!"

Rosemary bit her lips but said nothing, while Tyne stuck out her tongue and squinted her nose derisively.

"Hello, Rosemary," Tad greeted with lovelorn sadness. "You're not leaving for good, are you?"

"Her Daddy-Doc's coming in by airplane," Betty explained with a feeling of great importance.

"Then you're going to help us with the circus after all?" he asked hopefully.

"Certainly I am," Rosemary nodded, keeping her eyes and ears alert. "I hear a plane. Oh, there it is!" She pointed to a tiny black object low on the horizon, and ran back into the house, calling, "Hurry, Uncle Hiram, if we're going to catch a taxi and get to the airport. Daddy-Doc's plane's already in sight."

"Catch a taxi nothing," Aunt Polly laughed. "Uncle Will knows perfectly well where we live. Last time he came, he rode up in a taxi, and if we give him a few minutes' time, he'll do it again."

"Rosemary, I guess your Aunt Polly's right," Uncle Hiram said, "If you've already seen the plane, it will arrive long before we could reach the field anyway, and we'll likely miss your father for he'll be coming while we're still on the way. It'll be best to wait here."

"But isn't it dumb not to do something!" Rosemary commented to herself as she ran out into the street.

She now heard the zooming plane as it descended, and a few seconds later she was aware by the silence that the plane had glided to the ground.

"But can't we run down toward Lake Street or something?" she called to Betty. "What will Daddy-Doc think when he finds that I'm not there to meet him?"

"Why, he won't be expecting you at the field," Betty assured her. "Only wait and he'll be here in fifteen or twenty minutes."

After what seemed hours to Rosemary, the taxi finally came chugging up the street. Rosemary waved wildly at her father, and as soon as the taxi stopped, she dashed up to him and threw her arms about his neck.

"Well, Rosy-Posy, how are you?" her father asked affectionately.

"I'm entirely too happy to tell you," Rosemary whispered in his ear.

"Well, hello, Hiram, and I believe this is Betty. How you have grown. You're just as tall as Rosemary now, aren't you?"

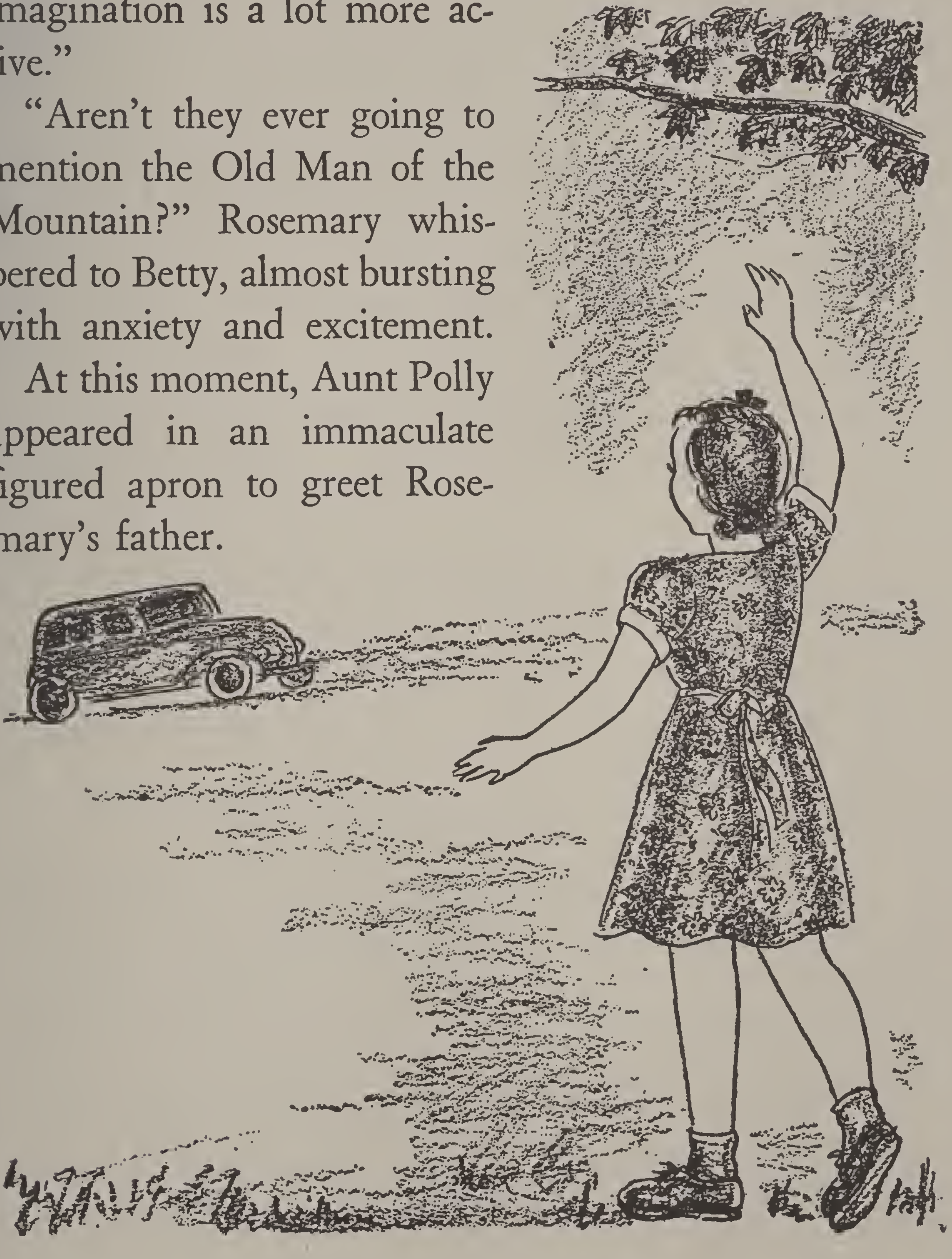
Aunt Polly, unaware that Rosemary's father had arrived, was giving things a few last finishing touches.

When they reached the porch, Uncle Will was saying, "Well, Hiram, you're looking about as usual. And how's Polly? As spick and span as always, I'm sure."

"If anything, she gets a little more particular as she grows older. Her eyes aren't nearly as good, but her imagination is a lot more active."

"Aren't they ever going to mention the Old Man of the Mountain?" Rosemary whispered to Betty, almost bursting with anxiety and excitement.

At this moment, Aunt Polly appeared in an immaculate figured apron to greet Rosemary's father.



25.

THE RAID ON MYSTERY MOUNTAIN

"Good morning, Polly, and how are you?" Rosemary's father smiled as he entered the house. "I see you haven't changed a bit. You're just as handsome and happy as ever. But how do you ever manage to live so high on the mountain?"

"You're a bit grayer, Will, but I doubt if you're a bit better-looking," Aunt Polly grinned.

"Yes, and you haven't put on a pound of weight."

"But that's not my fault. You see that's why I live so high on the mountain."

"And as usual, you're as neat as a pin."

"Well, we try to keep tolerably clean," Aunt Polly answered proudly while Uncle Hiram smiled in silence.

"Tolerable!" Rosemary's father laughed outright, "Why, you're immaculate!"

"Come right out into the dining room, and I'll get you a cup of coffee and a bite to eat. You must be half-starved, flying all the way from Chicago."

"It seems hardly yesterday since I was last here," Rosemary's father added, as he followed Aunt Polly and sat down at the table.

"I know you always did have a weakness for coffee!"

"For *your* coffee," Dr. Brown answered. "Why, I bore all my friends to death telling them about the delicious coffee you make."

Rosemary all this while was fidgeting impatiently. "How can I ever wait to tell him?" she whispered to Betty.

"And here are some doughnuts," Aunt Polly smiled as she set the plate before him. "And perhaps you'd like a piece of cherry pie."

"You forget that I eat a light breakfast, and flying hasn't added anything to my appetite. But I remember your wonderful cherry pie, and I really can't refuse a piece."

"You're going to take us all down to the hotel to dinner," Rosemary interrupted, no longer able to restrain herself. "Aunt Polly is expecting it."

"Don't listen to her, Will," Polly insisted. "Rosemary doesn't know what a treat it is for you to get some real home cooking."

"Yes, if you have more of this cherry pie baked and waiting, it would be a shame to run off to the hotel. Um—um!" and smacked his lips. As he sipped his coffee, he added, "How do you ever manage to do it, Polly? In Chicago they don't know what real coffee is like."

"By the way," Aunt Polly began in an entirely different tone of voice, "has Hiram told you what a regular Pinkerton detective Rosemary has turned out to be?"

"Why, no!" he exclaimed, turning toward his impatient daughter.

"I've solved the mystery of the Old Man of the Mountain," Rosemary burst forth, unable to remain silent any longer.

"The Old Man of the Mountain!" her father said in great surprise. "You don't mean you've been investigating that place!"

"There's a secret vault and there's a concealed stairway and, Daddy-Doc, there's an imprisoned girl by the name of Claribel Lee, and—" Rosemary chattered on spiritedly.

"Hiram, what's all this about?" interrupted Rosemary's father.

"Better let Rosemary finish her own story," replied Uncle Hiram laughing. "She can do a lot quicker job of it than anybody else."

"Rosemary is right," interrupted Aunt Polly, "she's actually solved the old mystery. She and Hiram and Betty went down town last night to inform the police, and the Chief is collecting all the able-bodied men he can find, and they're going to make a raid on the old hotel this morning. I shouldn't be surprised if the posse is on its way up the mountain this very minute."

"But I don't understand!" Rosemary's father repeated, turning to his daughter.

"Oh, no, it wasn't Aunt Polly's fault, nor Uncle Hiram's fault, nor Betty's fault either. It was all because of my own curiosity."

"Your curiosity has many sins to answer for," her father commented reminiscently.

"You see, I became so curious I couldn't wait another minute, and so I ran off alone up Mystery Mountain, when nobody knew where I was," and Rosemary went on with the whole story.

"And so you've notified the police?" her father asked eagerly, when she had finished.

"Yes," Uncle Hiram answered. "Poll and I examined the documents and they seem to be genuine. We figured it was the best way, for Rosemary wanted the raid made while you were here to help. She told the Chief, and he promised to wait for your arrival."

"A great lot of assistance I'll be," Rosemary's father laughed.

"Of course you'll be a lot of help," Rosemary exclaimed with enthusiasm. "I told the Chief what a very brave man you are, and how you're not afraid of anybody or anything, not even of smallpox, flu, or diphtheria!"

"You actually told the Chief that I wasn't afraid of smallpox!"

Rosemary's father maintained his usual calm, though he felt very much like laughing. "And what did the Chief say?"

"The Chief believed it," Rosemary replied. "He said he wouldn't make the raid until after you had arrived. He knew you'd be a great help."

Suddenly realizing how his daughter idealized him, Rosemary's father said seriously, "Of course I'll go, Rosemary, and I'm glad you had the Chief wait until I arrived. Hiram and I will take Betty and you along, and together we'll rescue Claribel."

At the sound of voices, Betty had gone to the window, and now she exclaimed, "Here they come! Here they come!"

Rosemary's father quickly finished his last cup of coffee, just as the posse of men, dressed in hunting clothes and each with a deer rifle or a shotgun across his arm, arrived. The Chief, his gun on his hip and his shining star on his breast, was in the lead.

"You go right along, and I'll have dinner ready when you get back," Aunt Polly announced in a tone of voice which meant that nothing must be allowed to interfere with her routine.

Uncle Hiram went fumbling into the closet, and came out with a dusty deer rifle and a double-barreled shotgun. "We'll have to carry these along simply to be in style," he said, handing the rifle to Rosemary's father.

"I'll do better with the shotgun. I haven't fired a shot for years."

"Of course there won't be any shooting, but it will look better if we take the guns," Uncle Hiram added in a matter-of-fact manner.

The next minute, as they went out into the street to join the raiders, they were aware of Aunt Polly's warning, "For goodness sake, do be careful, all of you, especially you girls."

After Uncle Hiram had introduced the Chief to Dr. William Brown, the Chief stopped long enough to smile kindly at Rosemary, "So this is your brave Daddy-Doc?" Then turning back to her father, he said, with a friendly handclasp, "I'm very glad you're going with us, sir."

The two men exchanged quick mirthful glances while Rosemary thought to herself, "Yes, and he's just as brave as I said he was!"

As they were ready to start forward, the Chief turned to Rosemary and Betty, "I'm sorry, but you two girls can't go along! No children are permitted on this raid."

"But Hiram and I will see that they don't get hurt," Rosemary's father answered calmly. "Besides, it seems to me that this is as much Betty's and Rosemary's excursion as it is ours, Chief. They have already visited the Old Man of the Mountain alone and without injury, and it isn't quite right to leave them behind now! With all this army of men, there's nothing to fear."

The Chief's face softened a bit as he answered, "Well, remember, if anything should happen to the girls, you'll be entirely responsible. I've given you fair warning that it's not my idea to take them along."

"Don't worry," Uncle Hiram assured him, "Rosemary and Betty are the kind of girls that can look out for themselves anywhere."

The Chief started forward, with the men close behind him, and a strange silence fell upon the group. Rosemary and Betty were conscious of the grinding gravel beneath the heavy boots and of much deep breathing as the men strained and toiled up the steep incline.

When they reached the steel picket fence, the Chief brought his men together behind a clump of jack pine and explained, in complete detail, the plan for the raid. The men were to wait until the stroke of ten from the town clock before moving forward, while the entire posse had been instructed to follow the method of a wolf hunt. A second group had been organized and had advanced from the opposite side of the mountain. Thus they would suddenly close in on all sides, to prevent any possible chance of escape.

One posse was to attack from the deep woods at the rear, while the posse under the command of the Chief, at the given signal, was to enter the hotel from the wide front veranda. The plan was to make a thorough search of the building as quickly as possible and then to explore the secret staircase and the hidden vault.

While awaiting the passing of the slow minutes, each man was given final instructions as to his individual duties. At last the town clock announced the hour. The Chief straightened to his full height and gave the command in a subdued voice, "Attention, men! Move quickly and silently."

Rosemary and Betty could feel their hearts beating wildly, as they and their fathers followed the others in the hurried advance.

26.

THE HEART OF THE MYSTERY

The men crouched low, keeping the clumps of poplar and jack pine between them and the Old Man of the Mountain as they pushed through the steel picket fence. Once inside the enclosure, they hurried to the front entrance of the hotel. A red squirrel stopped chattering and scampered up the Lombardy poplar, and a robin flew off her nest in the porch. As they reached the steps, Rosemary and Betty were conscious of the faint cry of a girl and of the loud crash of a door.

The men immediately threw their combined weight against the massive oak door. It creaked and trembled, but did not give way. A second time they charged and pushed, but again they failed to force it open.

The Chief stopped but a second to consider, for there was no time to lose. He backed away from the long French window beside the door, threw his shoulder against the sash, and sent it crashing into the lobby. He leapt through the window and the men followed.

At that moment a stooped old man hobbled down the wide circular staircase, forcibly pulling a slight, golden-haired girl whose eyes were blindfolded. As he started across the lobby in the direction of the hidden vault, the Chief drew his pistol and shouted, "Halt! Stick 'em up! You're under arrest!"

Terrified at the suddenness of the raid, the man stopped short and threw up his hands. Rosemary's father stepped calmly forward and removed the blindfold from the girl's eyes.

The Chief handcuffed the man and searched his pockets. Then turning to Rosemary and Betty, who were watching from near the window, he said kindly, "Now comes your turn, girls. You can tell this girl that everything is O. K."

Rosemary and Betty came forward, and Rosemary put her arm about the frightened girl as she whispered to her, "Don't be afraid, Claribel, we're your friends." And Betty added, "Oh, Claribel, I'm so happy," and she, too, put her arms about the astonished girl.

Claribel's pallid lips quivered, and two great tears rolled down her wan cheeks. Her eyes were swimming, as was her mind, and she was too bewildered to speak.

In the brief silence that followed, the men became aware of a thumping staccato down the corridor. A veiled woman in black was hurrying toward them. Before the Chief could collect his wits, the woman had disappeared through a side door and into the room from which ran the concealed staircase, closing the door behind her with a bang.

Two men were detailed to guard the handcuffed prisoner, while Rosemary and Betty and Dr. Brown were left to take care of Claribel. The others rushed headlong down the corridor in pursuit of the escaping woman.

The Chief tried to open the door which the woman had just slammed shut, but it was barred with a night latch. The Chief and two of his men put their shoulders against the door and strained every muscle but could not force it open. Wiping the perspiration from his forehead, the Chief remarked, "We'll have to think of some other way."

"We'll batter the door down!" came the answer.

Two of the men hurried through the broken window to the front entrance, picked up a loose piece of sandstone coping from the porch foundation, and lugged it back in their arms.

"We'll make quick work of it now!" they shouted.

Whang! Whang! resounded the measured impact of the heavy stone, and with the third blow the door splintered and flew open.

Excited over this last adventure, Rosemary entirely forgot Claribel for the moment and raced down the corridor and into the room behind the men.

"We'll have to figure this out," stammered the Chief as he surveyed the room. "The directions don't seem any too explicit as to just where we're to find the button that opens the secret door leading to the concealed stairs."

"Yes, they are," Rosemary piped up impulsively. "The button should be here at the left corner of the mantle over the fireplace. Yes, see? Here's a greasy spot on the wall that shows they've been using it. Here is the place, Mr. Chief. Listen while I press the button!"

The Chief was surprised at the girl's audaciousness and courage, but at once he heard a slight creaking rattle in the closet as the button was pressed. Sure enough, the opening door revealed the concealed stairs.

The Chief tiptoed into the closet, and peered down the long flight of stairs, but the deep gloom defied his vision. He had no idea how many people might be in hiding, ready to spring upon him without warning.

He pulled his cap lower over his eyes, still concentrating; and suddenly he had a clever idea. He banged the outside closet door as if closing it behind him, and then stamped with his feet as if descending the stairs. Then from the blackness came a hoarse, frightened whisper.

"Are you safe, Craig Harding?"

"Yes," answered the Chief, still pretending.

"And is Claribel safe, too?"

"Yes, she's safe."

"Thank God," came the relieved reply. "Whatever made them raid us so suddenly, and on a Sunday morning when we were off our guard?"

"Help me," whispered the Chief, pretending still further. "Here, help me, Claribel's caught her foot in the stairs."

When the woman in black, with her veil raised, stumbled out of the gloom, the Chief's pistol and flashlight were in position.

"Put up your hands!" he commanded.

The startled woman instinctively obeyed.

"And now come up these stairs, and be quick about it!" he thundered.

The woman stumbled slowly to the landing and out into the room. She was a pitiful sight to behold. Her face was wrinkled and sallow, her shoulders stooped, and her sunken eyes swollen. Her mouth was hard and dejected, and her black silk dress was shiny and in tatters. Her breath came in great sighs as she dropped her head in disgrace.

"And so Craig Harding told you where to find me?" she suddenly cried in cool anger, as the Chief handcuffed her.

"He did," the Chief replied truthfully, though the woman misinterpreted his answer.

"I'll get even with that scoundrel for telling on me," the woman spoke in deep resentment.

"Very well, proceed," the Chief urged curtly.

"The man you're holding handcuffed out there in the lobby is Craig Harding. He is the same man who built this ramshackle hotel."

"I knew it all the while," Rosemary exploded, quite unconscious of her superiors. "I saw the big scar in his cheek the other morning when you two were returning just before daylight with vegetables and a hen you had stolen."

"Silence, young Miss!" the Chief shouted harshly. "Another word, and out you go." Turning again to the old woman, he said, "Very well, if that's Craig Harding out there, then who are you?"

"That's none of your business," the woman replied insolently.

"We'll soon see about that. Who else have you got down in that hidden vault?"

"No one," replied the woman quickly.

"Are you sure?" the Chief asked coolly.

"Am I sure?" the woman smiled bitterly, "Am I sure! Just go down and take a look around for yourself!"

The Chief turned the woman over to one of his officers, and with his flashlight in one hand and his pistol in the other, cautiously felt his way down the stairs, followed by three or four members of the posse. After a few minutes, the Chief and the others returned without finding anyone else. The Chief addressed his first words to the old woman.

"Who is that girl out there with Craig Harding?"

"Ask Craig Harding that question," the woman answered with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Have you anything else to say?"

"No. Yes, I have. I think you're all a bunch of crooks!"

The Chief answered not a word as he led the woman back into the corridor, where the handcuffed prisoner was being held and where Betty and Dr. Brown were comforting Claribel.

"Well, Craig Harding, and how are you today?" The Chief smiled as he confronted the captive.

The man wilted, and the big white scar on his cheek stood out plainly upon his flushed face.

"I'm not Craig Harding!"

"Go slow there, Wolfe Barclay, we know who you are and all about your evil deeds, and this woman here knows that we do," the Chief declared firmly.

"Yes, and I told them, if you want to know," the woman added in defiance.

"If I'm Craig Harding," the man spoke with great effort and in a slow monotone, "if I'm Craig Harding, she's—Harriet Fairfax!"

"You're a traitor," the woman wailed, and had it not been for the handcuffs, she would have attacked him.

"You mean, Harriet, that we both are!" Craig Harding added in cold, sinister accents.

"Who is this Claribel Lee?" the Chief asked bluntly.

"That's none of your business," Harriet Fairfax replied bitterly.

"Not so fast!" commanded the Chief. "I'm asking Craig Harding."

"It's none of your business!" Craig Harding stammered.

"Very well, then, we'll ask the girl herself. Who are you Claribel?"

"That I dare not tell," came the plaintive reply. "That woman will whip me if I do."

"But she won't dare to touch you now," Betty whispered, her arm still around Claribel's waist.

Harriet Fairfax scowled at the girl with tigerish eyes.

"She will never harm you again," the Chief added with such sudden vehemence that Claribel burst out sobbing.

"There now, Claribel, nobody's going to hurt you," the Chief smiled.

"Of course nobody's going to hurt you," Rosemary added, as she, too, put her arm around the sobbing girl. "Listen, Claribel, you're going with Betty and me down to Aunt Polly's for the nicest Sunday dinner you've ever eaten."

Claribel smiled a faint, dubious smile.

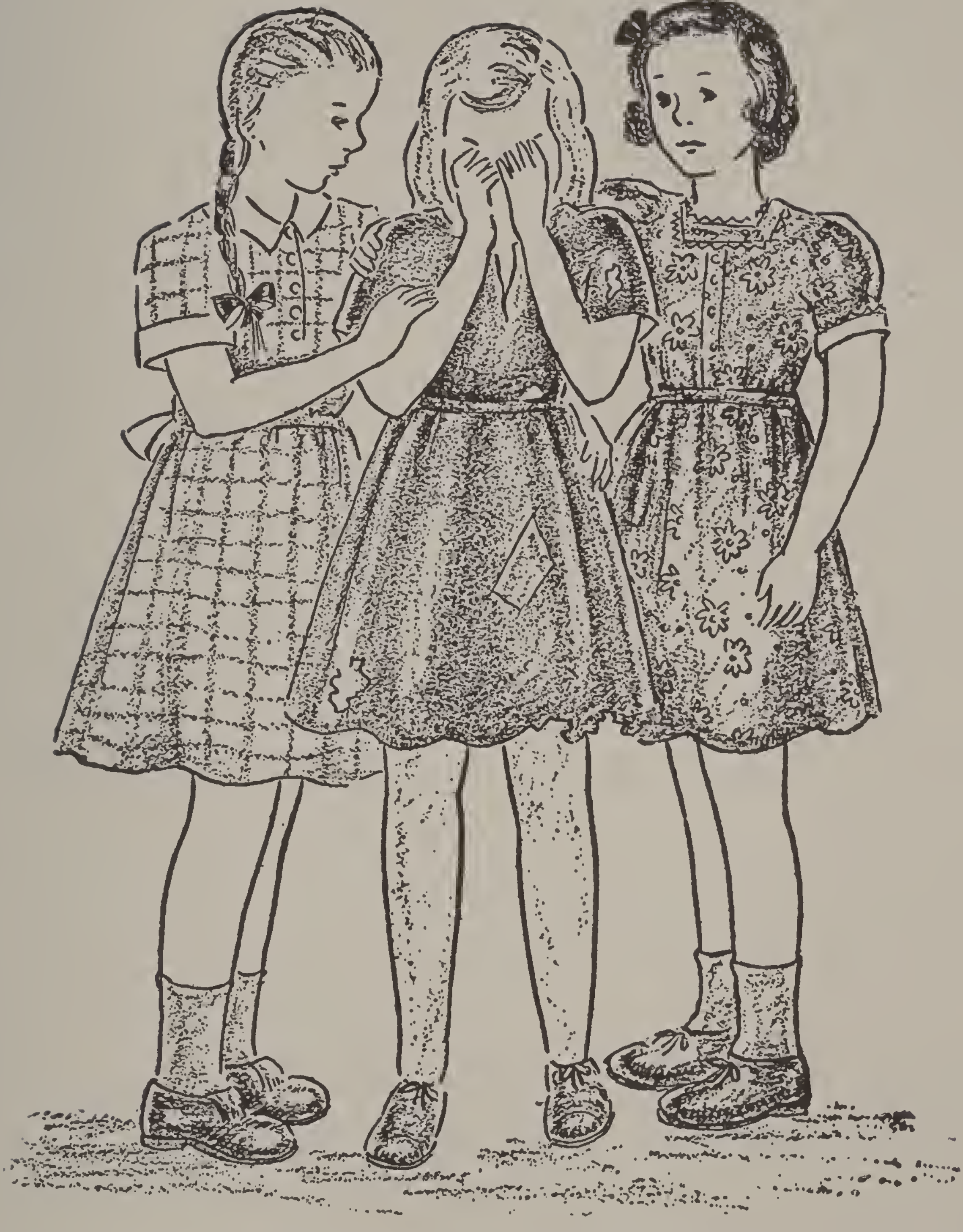
"Don't you see that both the old mummies are prisoners? Mr. Chief here will give them what they deserve," Rosemary continued, her heart overflowing with sympathy.

"Don't you understand," the Chief added, "that no one can harm you now, Claribel? These two, who kidnapped you and held you captive, are now our prisoners. You are free at last."

"Won't you allow the girl to come with us?" Dr. Brown asked as he put his hand gently on the frightened child's head.

"Yes, you are free, Claribel," Craig Harding spoke with great effort. "Neither Harriet nor I will ever harm you again. You are as free as a bird, to come and go as you like. And perhaps you will again find your rightful father and mother and be happy."

"Yes, Craig Harding is right," bemoaned the woman in black. "We are through with you, or better, you are through with us. And forgive us, if you can." As she spoke, Harriet Fairfax broke down, sobbing like a child.



"You're going with Betty and me down to Aunt Polly's"

"Then I won't be punished if I go out of this prison?" Claribel asked with eyes that seemed to see a new light.

"No one is going to harm you," Dr. Brown explained. "You're coming with Betty and Rosemary and Hiram and me this minute. Aunt Polly will never forgive us if we keep her Sunday dinner waiting, especially her cherry pie!"

"I'll leave Claribel in your charge for the present," the Chief announced to Uncle Hiram, "but I'll be seeing you later in the afternoon about her." And then turning to his prisoners, he added, "And you two will be coming with me. You'll be glad to tell me everything about Claribel and who she is by the time I've finished with you. Let's get going; forward, march!"

When they emerged at the front entrance, the Chief blew three vigorous blasts on his whistle. At this prearranged signal, men came hurrying from every direction, and in a minute or two the entire place was a seething crowd of people.

The Chief explained all that was known; and the men, after investigating the secret passageway and fully satisfying their curiosity, started down the mountain and back home, feeling that this had been a red-letter day in the life of the town.

27.

CLARIBEL BECOMES CLAIRE

Aunt Polly was just finishing the dinner, and the entire house was fragrant with roast chicken and other delectable, savory dishes, when Uncle Hiram opened the front door and ushered the girls into the house.

"It's about time you were getting back," Aunt Polly called, and then made her appearance in her immaculate apron.

"Yes, and we've brought our appetites with us," Rosemary's father said in anticipation, pulling a bunch of cockleburrs from one leg of his trousers.

"Well, did you find out anything?" Aunt Polly asked curiously.

"This is Claribel Lee," Rosemary announced in proud excitement. "This is Aunt Polly, Claribel."

"Is this really the girl that—" Aunt Polly was interrupted by the uplifted hand of Dr. Brown and changed her tone quickly, "Oh, yes, Claribel, we're glad you're here with us for dinner. We've not much to eat, but you're welcome to everything we've got."

"Aunt Polly's only spoofing," Rosemary's father laughed. "Claribel, you don't know how delicious Aunt Polly's food is until you've sampled one of her lavish Sunday dinners."

Claribel was so self-conscious and shy that she simply looked down at the floor and said nothing.

"But let's go up to our room," Betty suggested, and she and Rosemary led Claribel upstairs.

Betty went into the bathroom and turned on the water. "Claribel, you jump into the tub, and Rosemary and I will get you some fresh clothes and then everything will be fine!"

Claribel did as she was bid, and while she was in the tub, Rosemary and Betty laid out a complete outfit of their own clothes for her. As the girls helped Claribel to dress, her features at last relaxed and a shy smile began to play about her lips.

"Have you lived long at the Old Man of the Mountain?" Rosemary began, hoping to get Claribel started talking.

"Oh, is that what you call the place?" Claribel's eyes opened wide.

"They used to call it a castle," Betty explained, "but that was years ago."

"And how long do you say you've lived at the top of Mystery Mountain?" Rosemary asked.

"Almost as long as I can remember, but not quite," Claribel replied in a voice that revealed an overtone of sweet sadness.

The kindly interest of Betty and Rosemary quickly worked a complete change in Claribel, and her face relaxed as she lost her sense of fear.

"Where did you live before you came here?" Rosemary continued.

"I lived in Chicago, I believe, but it's been so long ago that it seems like a fairy tale."

"Why, that's funny, I live in Chicago, too," Rosemary exclaimed excitedly.

"Isn't that strange," Claribel smiled.

"It's the kind of thing you're always told to beware of when you meet strangers, but this time it's true. It only shows how small the world is after all," Rosemary chattered, remembering one of her father's oft-repeated maxims.

"But how did you happen to come to the Old Man of the Mountain?"

"I don't know exactly, but I believe I was brought. You call it kidnapped, or something like that."

"Kidnapped is right! That's just what I've thought all the while," Rosemary answered, feeling very proud of herself.

"I was out playing alone in front of the house one day," Claribel continued with a sudden show of sorrow, as she recalled the calamity that had befallen her. "We lived in a great beautiful house, almost as large as the Old Man of the Mountain, as you call it. It was on Michigan Avenue, yes, I'm sure that is the name. My mother was away at some party on that particular afternoon, and the nurse was careless about watching me. She was reading, and her mind was a million miles away—at least that's what my mother always accused her of doing while she was out. As I remember, I opened the door without making a noise, and then slipped into the front yard."

"And then?" asked Rosemary in breathless excitement.

"And then a man stopped in the street and called me to him. He was dressed like a gentleman. He limped and carried a large gold-headed cane. He gave me a bag of candy, and I went with him into a side street. Here we met a woman in black, the same woman you saw up at the castle, and next thing I knew we were in a dark room. The woman somehow put me to sleep."

"Perhaps it was the candy that did it," Betty suggested.

"No doubt she drugged you," Rosemary agreed excitedly.

"The next thing I remember, we were in a Pullman, and next, I was a prisoner at the top of Mystery Mountain."

"How dreadful," Betty commented, almost in tears. "But what did they do it for?"

"They wanted to get a lot of money from my father. But they always quarrelled and said they were double-crossed, whatever that means, and that some other crook forced them out and collected the money himself. That's why they were forced to hide me, for fear of being caught themselves."

"And who was your father?" Rosemary asked.

"My father was President of the Bruce Tile Company. His first name was Robert, but Mother always called him Bob. And my name isn't Claribel, but Claire."

"And so you're Claire Bruce!" Rosemary exclaimed. "My Uncle Hiram was telling Betty and me about you the other evening."

"Yes," Betty added, "there was a reward of ten thousand dollars offered for your return."

"And I'll wager my Daddy-Doc will know just where to find your father," Rosemary asserted.

At this juncture, the girls were interrupted by Aunt Polly, who called happily, "Claribel, Rosemary, Betty! Girls! Dinner is ready, and if you want anything to eat, you had better hurry!"

"We're coming, Aunt Polly," Rosemary shouted in reply. "And Claire, remember that we are all your friends. We'll take you back to your family in Chicago when Daddy-Doc and I return home. And now we'll go downstairs and tell the family everything."

The others were already seated at the table when Claire, Rosemary, and Betty reached the dining room.

"Let me introduce you to Claire Bruce," Rosemary announced promptly, "the daughter of Robert Bruce, the President of the Bruce Tile Company of Chicago. And Uncle Hiram, didn't you say there was a reward of ten thousand dollars offered for her return?"

"Yes, there was a few years ago, but I don't know if the reward is still up," Uncle Hiram drawled in an effort not to show his real excitement.

"But Rosemary," her father interrupted good-humoredly, "You girls must sit down this very minute, or Aunt Polly's wonderful dinner will be getting cold."

"Oh, how can anyone think of eating at such a time as this!" Rosemary exclaimed.

"This is exactly the time to eat," her father insisted. "You don't want to make all the rest of us as restless as you are. We'll hear no more of this till we've finished eating. Then, if you're good girls, I have something to tell you that will make all three of you very, very happy. But not another word now!"

"Right you are, Uncle Will," Aunt Polly added smiling. "We'll start eating now without any more of this palaver."

"But, please, Daddy-Doc," Rosemary again began.

"Rosemary, in your excitement you're forgetting your manners," her father lightly reproved, and with this, she took her place quietly beside Claire and Betty.

The three girls pretended to eat, but everything tasted the same. They were entirely too excited to be at all interested in food.

"Rosemary," her father called across the table, "you girls haven't eaten enough to keep a robin alive."

"We're sorry," Rosemary apologized, remembering her manners. "Aunt Polly, we know everything is very good. But somehow, we're not hungry today."

"That's entirely all right," Aunt Polly laughed. "I think I know how you feel. I'm a little off center myself."

Rosemary's father pulled a cigar case from his pocket and handed it to his brother. A minute later Uncle Hiram and Dr. Brown were smoking contentedly. Rosemary's father leaned back leisurely in his chair, and turned toward Aunt Polly.

"You know I haven't enjoyed a dinner so much in months. How I wish we had somebody in Chicago who knew how to prepare a real feast like this!"

"But Daddy-Doc," Rosemary called out while Aunt

Polly was still struggling to find words for an appropriate answer, "you said you have something to tell us that will make us very happy."

"So I have," he began, drawing another contented puff of smoke from his cigar. "Claire, I know your father, Robert Bruce, almost as well as I know my own brother here, and unless I miss my guess, Claire, you'll be at home and safe in your own bed tomorrow night, if not sooner. Folks, this is just another illustration of how very small the old world is after all."

"But Daddy-Doc, how can you be so poky?" Rosemary called, beside herself in excitement. "How can you put off letting Claire's father know what's happened!"

Rosemary's father raised himself from his chair with an effort. Mountain climbing and a hearty dinner were a combination that was almost too much for him. He took three more deliberate pulls from his cigar, made a wry face, and then smiled.

"Hiram, these girls will be the death of us yet. They don't give us a minute's peace, but I suppose we'd better be going."

So saying, Dr. Brown went to the telephone and called a taxi.

"We're going along, too," Rosemary insisted.

"You girls are going to stay here," her father replied. "The afternoon will pass before we know it. It's after two o'clock now, and our pilot is expecting us to start back at five."

"But you're not going to take Rosemary with you, I hope," Aunt Polly said with feeling. Rosemary had been somewhat of a care, but Aunt Polly began to feel lonesome merely at the thought of her going.

"We've only begun to get acquainted," Betty added.

"Yes, Rosemary will be going back with me," her father insisted, for he felt lonesome at the very mention of leaving her behind.

"Well, it'll be a big job to get her things ready by five o'clock," Aunt Polly replied, "but if you say so, it can be done."

"The trunk can be sent by express later," her father explained. "All that's necessary today is to take her handbags."

Dr. Brown took his soft felt hat off the rack behind the door, ready to start. In the excitement, Betty had been almost entirely submerged, but now she found the chance to speak.

"Don't be gone long, Dad, and see if you can't persuade Uncle Will to let Rosemary stay another week."

"And don't forget about the reward," Rosemary called after them.

Soon Rosemary's father and Uncle Hiram were jiggling down the steep mountainside toward Police Headquarters. As the taxi driver hurried along, the doctor's voice softened.

"Hiram, I wish you'd take a week off sometime and let me show you the sights about Chicago. You could make a visit just as well as not. The Ore Dock would still be here when you returned."

"I've often thought about it," Uncle Hiram replied, "but somehow I never quite manage to get started. Polly, you know, will never consent to go herself, and she keeps me pretty busy around the house when there's a day off."

There followed a wistful silence. Dr. Brown puffed at his cigar while Uncle Hiram sat lost in his wandering thoughts. After a time Rosemary's father spoke again.

"Well, you can at least bundle Betty up and send her along some day soon, and this will give you an excellent excuse to come to Chicago for a day or two when it's time to bring her home. I'll expect you to do this before the year is out."

"Yes, perhaps I can," Uncle Hiram replied with a far-away expression.

When they entered the Police Headquarters, the Chief was awaiting them in his private office. He listened eagerly as they explained their errand.

"We've not yet been able to get a confession either from Craig Harding or Harriet Fairfax," the Chief said when they had finished, "but if the girl proves to be Claire Bruce, as you say, we'll finish with the prisoners in short order."

"The next thing of importance then," Dr. Brown added, "is to get hold of Bob Bruce on the phone."

"Very well," the Chief agreed. "You call him up, and I'll listen in on the conversation to see that everything is on the square."

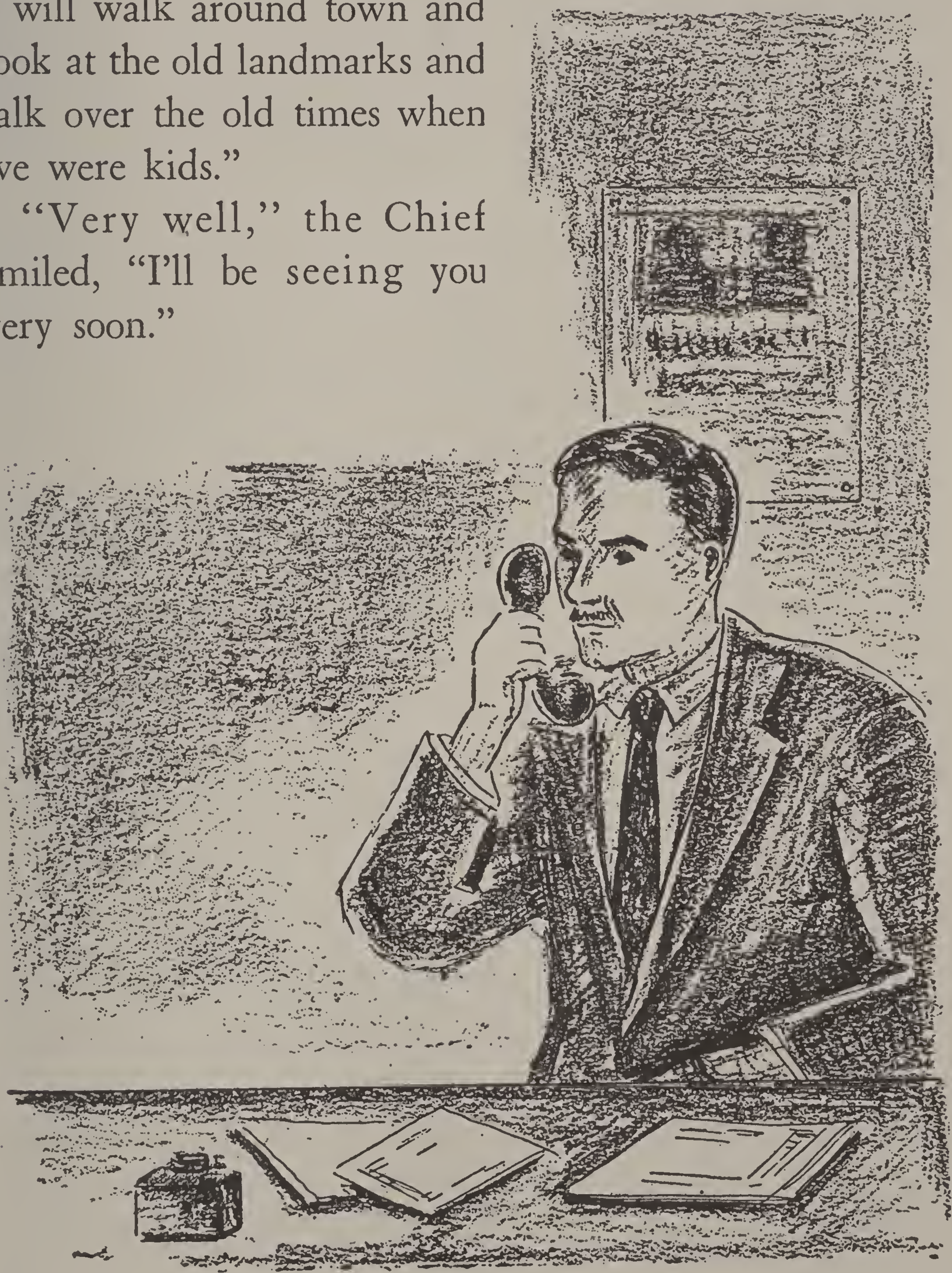
Rosemary's father took up his telephone and the Chief took up the extension on the adjoining desk and listened.

"I want to talk with Bob Bruce, President of the Bruce Tile Company of Chicago. Yes, his name is simply Robert Bruce, and his residence is on Michigan Avenue," he explained to the long-distance operator. "Hurry the call, and don't mind the expense. Get it through as quickly as possible. It's most important that I get the call through immediately."

Several minutes later, when the conversation was completed, Dr. Brown and the Chief talked over the further details of the case.

"Well, everything's settled," Rosemary's father announced to Uncle Hiram. "Bob Bruce must nearly have had heart failure by the time I had finally explained everything that has happened. He's chartering a plane and will be here in Marquette within three hours. And now, Chief, you'll be at the field when Bob Bruce arrives and bring him up to Hiram's house for the meeting with Claire. If you'll excuse us now, Chief, Hiram and I will walk around town and look at the old landmarks and talk over the old times when we were kids."

"Very well," the Chief smiled, "I'll be seeing you very soon."



28.

IT ENDS HAPPILY

When Rosemary's father and Uncle Hiram returned from their conference with the Chief, they found the two girls impatiently waiting to hear about all that had happened. Claire was upstairs sound asleep, exhausted by the intense excitement.

Rosemary began her barrage of questions before her father had time to find a comfortable chair.

"Were you able to talk with Claire's father?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"Among other things, that he would charter a plane. He should arrive here in Marquette in about two hours."

"Oh, I'm so happy!"

"So am I," smiled Betty.

Rosemary and Betty had been moving about restlessly, but now they sat down side by side, facing Rosemary's father.

"And is the ransom money still offered for Claire's return?" Rosemary continued.

"Yes, everything's fine," her father replied, again opening his cigar case and handing it to Uncle Hiram.

"Oh, Betty!" Rosemary exclaimed, "How wonderful! We'll divide the money equally. And when we're ready for college, the ten thousand will pay our way through."

"But I don't deserve half the money," Betty answered seriously.

"You surely do," Rosemary insisted, "for if it hadn't been for you and Uncle Hiram, I would never have known anything about the Old Man of the Mountain, and all that had happened there, and could never have found the copper box or have known about Claire."

Rosemary's father and Uncle Hiram sat back, enjoying their cigars and listening. Each was proud of the fine spirit that the girls showed toward each other, and knew that this was the beginning of a lifelong friendship between them. The fathers had, however, secretly decided that all the money should be deposited to Betty's credit and used in sending her to college.

After a time Dr. Brown said: "We'll stop the argument just where it is. If the ransom money is paid, Betty shall surely have her half of it, and that's that! And now, Rosemary, you had better get your things packed so that we can take your suitcases with us. Hiram, you can send the trunk by express later."

As Betty and Rosemary hurried upstairs, Aunt Polly came down, breathless and efficient as usual. "Well, that little job is finished. But Will, you surely can get along without Rosemary for another week. We'll all miss her so much, especially Betty. Besides, she has plans to be in a small circus with Tyne and Hen and Tad."

"I'm sorry, Polly," Rosemary's father explained as he slowly blew a circle of smoke, "but it's best that Rosemary return with me."

He was careful to conceal his real reason—his loneliness at the thought of parting from his impetuous daughter.

"Well, she's more than welcome to stay," Uncle Hiram added with feeling.

"We've certainly had a lively time while she's been here," Aunt Polly laughed. "And believe me, she's kept us on the jump every minute."

"That's just like her," her father smiled. "But Polly, you and Hiram and Betty are all going to visit us in Chicago very soon. You deserve a vacation, you know. You can let Betty come first for a month's visit, if you like, and then you and Hiram can come to see the sights and bring Betty home."

"Well, we're always pretty busy," Aunt Polly answered with a sigh, "but we'll at least make the effort."

As she spoke, Uncle Hiram's expression showed that he was not at all certain that this plan would succeed, but he added, "This time, Poll, I believe we can make a go of it."

While they were thus busily visiting, they were quite unaware that a crowd had begun to gather outside the house. At first it was made up mostly of children, but soon men and women began to appear. Next a motorcycle policeman arrived, and then more and more people, and then more policemen, until the entire street for two or three blocks was a solid mass.

By this time Rosemary had her things packed, and Claire had awakened. Before coming downstairs, the girls went to the window and took another look at the Old Man of the Mountain.

"He looks quite forlorn and deserted," Rosemary suggested.

"To me, he looks a bit foolish now that his secret is out," Betty replied.

"And I hope I'll never have to think of him again," Claire added.

"There's our kite still dangling from the Lombardy," Betty laughed.

As the girls came downstairs, the reporters from the Associated Press and the special reporters from newspapers in Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Detroit began to arrive. They were brought to the door by policemen who had opened a passage for them through the crowd.

The story of the Old Man of the Mountain was the biggest piece of news that had broken in the entire country on this particular Sunday, and the press was clamoring for every scrap of copy that could be collected. Every reporter hoped to outwit his competitor, so there was a feverish scramble.

In the city newspaper offices thousands of miles away, editors were writing scareheads for their early morning editions:

TWO TWELVE-YEAR OLD GIRLS OUTWIT
NATION'S DETECTIVES AND
POLICE FORCES

For the next hour Rosemary and Betty and Claire, Dr. Brown, Uncle Hiram, and Aunt Polly were in a turmoil of intense activity. There were hundreds of questions to be answered and dozens of pictures to be taken, both inside the house and outside in the street, with the crowd as a background.

The excitement became still more intense when the police broke a passageway through the crowd for Claire's father and mother. Many of the women in the street wept for joy at the happy reunion of the Bruces, and many of the men tried to hide the tears in their eyes.

Dr. Brown and Robert Bruce talked everything over confidentially with the Chief, and decided all the details for the future procedure.

Then Rosemary's father called his daughter to him and said, "We shall have to call a taxi this minute, and get back to the flying field. We're already nearly an hour overdue."

"But, Daddy-Doc," Rosemary pleaded, "we can't go now when everything is so exciting."

"I'm sorry, Rosy-Posy, but I have a very important operation scheduled in the morning at nine o'clock!"

"But it's a shame we can't stay to see things through," Rosemary teased.

"Really, there's nothing left to do. The Chief reports that Craig Harding and Harriet Fairfax have already admitted their guilt. When they were told that we had discovered who Claire Bruce is, they realized that it was futile to deny the truth. The Bruces will remain until tomorrow, and take care of the legal side of the case. And so we must be going."

When Betty heard the decision, she, too, was disappointed. "Oh, what a shame, when everything's so thrilling." She kissed Rosemary, and as the big tears came, she promised to come to Chicago very soon for a visit.

"How like a Brown! He would decide to go just at the wrong time!" grinned Aunt Polly. "But, Rosemary, we'll never forgive you if you don't come back soon and make us a real visit. This one was much too short."

Uncle Hiram hoped that he, too, might come to Chicago sometime, but he didn't know just when he could get away.

Rosemary kissed Claire, too, and Claire promised to telephone her as soon as she arrived in Chicago so that they could become better acquainted.

Robert Bruce talked quietly with Rosemary's father and arranged for another meeting in Chicago at an early date.

After the goodbyes were all said and the promises given for renewed visits, the Chief led Dr. Brown and Rosemary through the staring crowd and past the flashing cameras.

In the midst of the crowd Rosemary was conscious of Tyne's strident voice, "Goodbye, Rosemary. But we could just as well have done it ourselves."

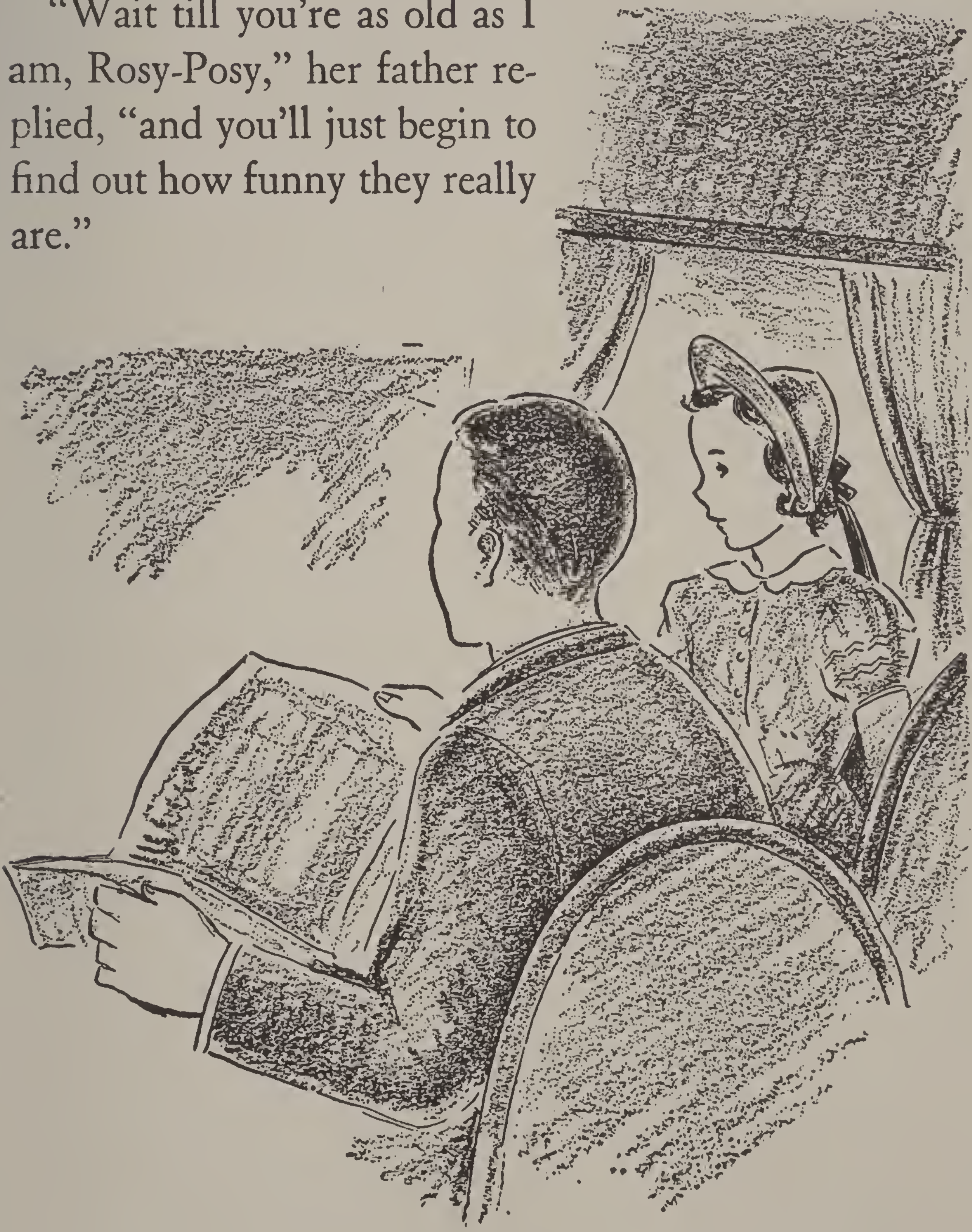
She also heard Tad's reply, "No, we couldn't. Rosemary was right, we were all afraid; but Rosemary was wonderful. Goodbye, Rosemary."

And then Hen shouted, "Tad's right, we knew all the time you were wonderful. Goodbye." And Rosemary shouted in reply, "Thank you, and goodbye."

When they were at last safe in the plane and were cruising back to Chicago, Rosemary had time to catch her breath and do a bit of thinking.

"Aren't people funny things!" she remarked after a long while.

"Wait till you're as old as I am, Rosy-Posy," her father replied, "and you'll just begin to find out how funny they really are."



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